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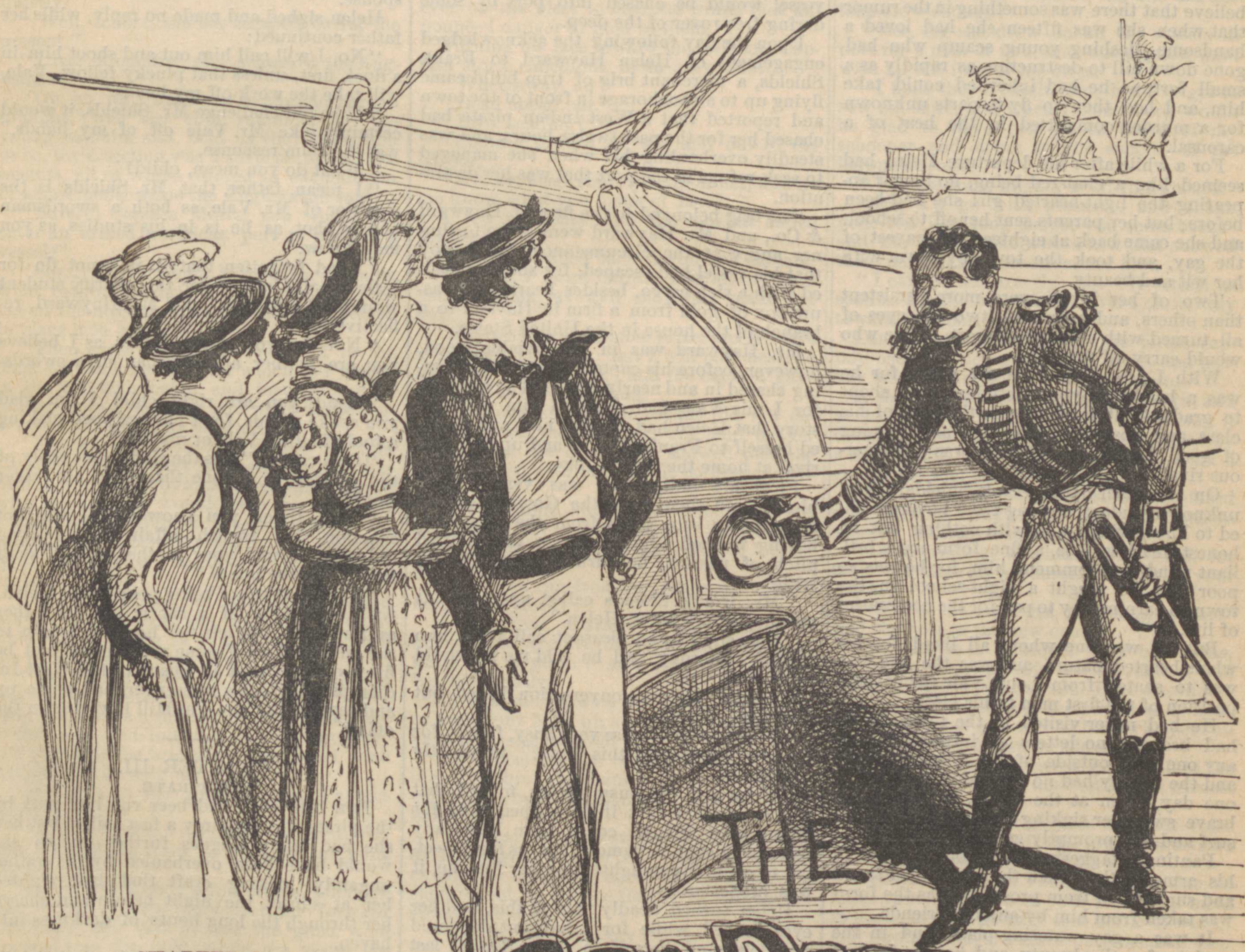
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CHAPTER I.

DISCARDED.

"Woe be unto you, Helen Hayward, if you marry that man!"

"Do I understand this is to be a threat against Frank Shields, or myself, or that I will be made unhappy by becoming his wife, sir?"

"Take it as you please, Helen, for I care not; but I have said woe be unto you if you become the wife of Frank Shields."

"I am not to be intimidated by threats, as you shall see, Louis Vale."

"Ah! this means that you intend to cast me aside—I, who offer you an honest heart, riches, and have the sanction of your parents, to link your destiny with a poor charity student?"

"It means just that, sir."

SEA DESPERADO

BY

COL PRENTISS INGRAHAM

THE SEA DESPERADO RAISED HIS CAP, AND BOWING LOW, TURNED QUICKLY AND SPRUNG BACK TO HIS OWN DECK.

"Your parents will never allow you to sacrifice yourself to become the wife of an unknown pauper."

"Mr. Vale is insulting in speaking of the man that I love as an unknown pauper."

"What else is he, then?"

"A poor man, true, but an honorable one, and who, though unknown to you, is not so to me."

"Well, I can only repeat my warning and take my leave, telling you plainly that I will not see the woman I love so sacrifice herself."

"Good afternoon, Miss Hayward."

She bowed coldly, and the man left the room and the house.

Helen Hayward was the belle of the New England country town in which she lived, and an heiress as well as a beauty, it was no wonder that she was the center of attraction around which revolved a number of the students of a large University situated in the place.

An only child, every advantage had been given her, so that she was most thoroughly accomplished, and had the gift of making herself fascinating to the professors of the University as well as to their most stupid pupils, for she slighted no one.

Many sought her hand, and her constant refusals of eligible offers led her intimates to believe that there was something in the rumor that when she was fifteen she had loved a handsome, dashing young scamp who had gone down-hill to destruction as rapidly as a small fortune he had inherited could take him, and had then to fly to parts unknown for a murder committed in the heat of a carousal.

For a while after his departure Helen had seemed like a changed being, no longer appearing the light-hearted girl she had been before; but her parents sent her off to school, and she came back at eighteen the gayest of the gay, and took the town by storm with her wit and beauty.

Two of her lovers were more persistent than others, and upon these two the eyes of all turned with strange interest, to see who would carry off the prize.

With Louis Vale were the odds, for he was a handsome young student, just about to graduate at least next to the head of his class, and possessing a fortune and coming of good family, he certainly was a dangerous rival.

On the other hand, Frank Shields was an unknown student, coming from no one seemed to know where, and with nothing but an honest, fearless face, a fine form and a brilliant mind to recommend him, for he was so poor that he taught a night-school in the town to earn money to pay for the necessities of life.

But he was one whom all liked for his whole-hearted nature, and was the one who was to snatch from Louis Vale the coveted position of the first man in his class.

He had never visited in the town, for he had brought no letters of introduction to any one, and outside of his fellow-students and the faculty had no acquaintances, until, one day, when at the beach, he had seen a brave swimmer sinking far out beyond the surf and had promptly gone to the rescue.

Panting, staggering, he brought back in his arms to the beach the one he had saved and sunk down from prostration as the form was taken from him by anxious friends.

It was a gay watering-place, and in the anxiety for the beauty and heiress he had saved no one thought of the poor student who had run down to the ocean for a rest of two days from his studies.

Taking himself to his bath-house as soon as he could, he put on his clothes and was making his way back to his humble lodgings, when he heard an exclamation near him, and a rich voice cry:

"Father, that is my brave preserver!"

The speaker was Helen Hayward, and her father now recognized the student as one he had often seen, and whose worth he had heard of.

Knowing him to be poor he had attempted to pay with gold for the life of his daughter, but was repulsed with a cold dignity that embarrassed him, and compelled to acknowledge the student as his equal and not one whom he could reward as for a service rendered.

Hence it was that Frank Shields was invit-

ed to visit at the elegant home of the Haywards, and became a dangerous rival of the rich Louis Vale for the hand of Helen.

The parents of the maiden looked coldly upon the poor student, and encouraged the visits of Louis Vale, the rich young aristocrat; but Helen seemed ever to enjoy the society of Frank Shields the most, and at last, when compelled to give a decided answer to her other lover, she boldly told him that she was pledged to the man who had saved her life.

Like wild-fire the rumor spread through the town that Frank Shields had won in the race for Helen Hayward's hand, for love-secrets, like murder, will out, and hot upon the heels of this report came another that turned it into an awful tragedy, and cast a gloom over all.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIVAL LOVERS.

A HALF-CENTURY ago, at the time of which I write, the seas were not, as to-day, free from the dangers of piracy, and a vessel that set sail for other lands was forced to keep a bright lookout from the mast-head for any craft of a suspicious look met with upon the ocean.

Deeds of outlawry upon the high seas were then of often occurrence, and many a time a vessel would be chased into port by some daring free rover of the deep.

Upon the day following the acknowledged engagement of Helen Hayward to Frank Shields, a merchant brig of trim build came flying up to an anchorage in front of the town and reported that a West Indian pirate had chased her for the past twelve hours, and was steadily overhauling her when she managed to seek refuge in the port that was her destination.

The brig belonged to the firm of Hayward & Co., and Mr. Hayward went home to dinner angry at the circumstance, but happy that his vessel had escaped, for she was loaded with a rich cargo, besides bearing a treasure-box of gold from a firm in Havana to a branch of the house in the United States.

Mr. Hayward was in no enviable mood, however, before his captain had reported being chased in and nearly captured by a pirate, for Louis Vale had come to him with the story that Helen had refused him and pledged herself to Frank Shields, and upon his arrival at home the storm broke.

First his indignation was vented upon pirates, and then upon the Government for not driving such pests from the seas, and, having worked himself up to the desired pitch of passion, he turned upon Helen, with:

"Mr. Frank Shields called upon me this morning at my office, Helen."

"Yes, sir, I had a pleasant call from him myself, yesterday, and he told me he would speak with you."

"He did, but our conversation lasted but a very short while."

"I suppose you were very busy, father, for I know you are at this time?" innocently said Helen.

"I was not too busy, Helen, to tell that pauper student that if he wished gold for saving your life, he could have it in any reasonable sum he named; but, as for expecting to claim my daughter and her fortune, it was preposterous."

Helen turned deadly pale at this, and her eyes flashed, while for a moment she could not command herself to reply; but at last she said, calmly:

"Your answer to Mr. Shields was far different from mine, father, for I told him that I loved him, would marry him, and if you disinherited me that we could work together for our daily bread."

Mr. Horace Hayward, merchant and millionaire, was upon his feet in a rage, and paced to and fro, fuming with passion, which caused Helen to say:

"Sit down, father, and calm yourself, for the pirate has upset you."

"Curse the pirate, Helen Hayward! it is you that has upset me by such utter disobedience."

"How have I disobeyed you, sir?"

"In pledging yourself to that pauper."

"You never told me not to do so, father."

"Because I never thought you such a silly girl as to think of him other than with kindness."

"But I dismissed him in a hurry, you can know, and he'll be a bold man if he ever crosses the threshold of my door again."

"Mr. Louis Vale also called upon you, sir, I believe?"

"He did."

"Upon what errand, may I ask, father?" queried Helen, in the same innocent tone.

"Upon the same errand that Shields sought me."

"Ah! and your answer, sir?"

"That he was a gentleman, came of good family, and had my consent to make you his wife."

"How unfortunate for the peace of our family, father, that I cannot see Mr. Vale as you do; but, the truth is, I do not like him, and have only tolerated him to please you and mother."

"You will learn to love him."

"Pardon me, sir, but I already love another, and am pledged to become his bride."

"Which you shall never be."

"So Mr. Louis Vale was unmanly enough to threaten me."

"I am glad that he feels as I do, and will have the nerve to win, for you shall never marry that pauper student, Helen."

"With your consent, father?"

"Ay, or without it," was the vehement response.

Helen sighed and made no reply, while her father continued:

"No, I will call him out and shoot him in a duel, first, unless that plucky fellow, Vale, will take the work off my hands."

"If he did challenge Mr. Shields, it would certainly take Mr. Vale off of my hands," was the calm response.

"What do you mean, child?"

"I mean, father, that Mr. Shields is the superior of Mr. Vale, as both a swordsman and a shot, as he is in his studies, as you may know."

"I had forgotten that; it will not do for Vale to call him out, for the charity student would kill him sure," said Mr. Hayward, reflectively.

"Nor for you either, father, as I believe you are neither a marksman or a swordsman."

"Egad! you are right, child, I am glad you spoke of this, for I have escaped making a fool of either Vale or myself."

"Or a corpse," was the significant reply of the maiden, in a tone that made her father shudder.

"Well, Helen, you know that I will not sanction this foolish affair with young Shields, nor will your mother, and I shall forbid him the house."

"For the crime of being poor," said Helen, with something of a sneer; but her father said no more, but left the house to return to the office and see if some vessel could not be fitted out and sent in chase of the West Indian pirate which a messenger had come up and reported to him was still hovering in the offing.

CHAPTER III.

THE PIRATE.

THE brig that had been run into port by the pirate was certainly a fast sailer; but had she had many leagues further to go she would have been overhauled by the rather ungainly-looking craft that had sighted her at sunset the night before and chased her through the long hours of darkness into haven.

The pirate, as seen from the deck of the brig, was a craft of West Indian build, long, low amidships, and with a high bow and stern, and rigged with three short masts and huge lateen sails.

She carried five guns on a broadside, a pivot bow-chaser, and her decks seemed filled with men whose red woolen skull-caps could just be seen above the high bulwarks.

A closer inspection of the craft showed that she had points that would please a sailor's eye, while her crew looked to be as villainous a set as could be congregated together in so small a space.

Upon her quarter-deck, as she put up into the wind and lay to, upon seeing the coveted prize escape her by running into shelter of the harbor, stood four officers, as their dress indicated.

They were all young men, two of them

evidently of Spanish blood, one an Englishman, and the other an American.

The first two had the dark faces, black eyes and slender forms of their race; the Englishman was a tall, finely-built man with a reckless face, and the look of one who had been born to better fortune than herding with sea cut-throats; while the American was the youngest of the quartette, with an aristocratic cast of countenance, marred by dissipation and recklessness, and a look of almost desperation haunting his otherwise fine eyes.

He was the commander of the vessel, and was known to his crew as El Capitan, while he answered to the name of Captain Morte.

He wore white duck pants, a loose jacket of blue flannel, trimmed with gold lace, a yellow silk sash about his waist, and a tarpaulin encircled by a gold cord.

In his sash were stuck two pistols, and a sword hung on a hook by his side.

His under officers, or lieutenants, were dressed in similar style, excepting that their trimmings were of silver instead of gold lace, while the crew boasted of a pair of white pants, a blue woolen shirt, red skull-cap, went barefooted, but were armed to the teeth, and looked the desperate set they were.

Turning to his officers as the brig disappeared in the harbor, Captain Morte said quietly:

"Well, senors, she has escaped us for the present."

"I fear altogether, sir," answered the Englishman.

"Oh, no, for I shall run in and cut her out to-night," was the cool rejoinder of the young captain, and, bold as they knew him to be, the assertion was a surprise to his lieutenants, all of whom uttered an exclamation of amazement, while the Englishman said:

"Surely, Captain Morte, you would not enter an armed American port to cut out a vessel?"

"Surely I will, Senor Duval, for I know what cargo that brig carries, having been one of the hired crew in Havana that helped to place it in her hold."

"Then I was one of the men sent to the bank for the kegs of gold which are stored in the captain's cabin, and just before her sailing hour I deserted and went to the rendezvous as rapidly as possible."

"You know that we have chased her from the day after she left Havana; but she has held her own wondrously well, and rigged with more canvas would make the very craft I want, for the Winged Witch is getting too full of holes to last us much longer, especially if we are to be hunted so close by cruisers."

"The brig is a flyer, sir, and can stand heavier spars, as you say; but you run a terrible risk in going in to cut her out," said the pirate Lieutenant Duval.

"Our lives are full of risks, Duval, and this one will be no greater than many I have run; but I have a private matter calling me to this port, and intended landing anyhow, and now that the brig has eluded me I shall certainly go in with my vessel."

"But not in her present trim, Captain Morte?"

"Oh, no; I shall disguise her, and you may now set the crew to stowing the guns away."

The lieutenant gave a few orders, a derrick was rigged of two spars over the forward hatchway, and one by one the guns were lowered into the hold, while the vessel lay quietly at anchor just in sight of the distant town.

Next the crew removed every evidence of an armed vessel, and just as the sun set and shut out the land from view, the huge lateen-spars were lowered from the short masts and top-masts of considerable height were stepped, thus transforming the rig of the craft into a fore and aft schooner.

The tops of the high bulwarks were then taken off, reducing the height a foot or more, and the upward rake of the bows and stern were removed, so that the vessel presented the appearance of an ordinary coaster, excepting that her hull was certainly a very beautiful and saucy model.

As soon as darkness began to fall, sail was set upon the pirate craft, and under a fair breeze she was headed for the port some leagues away.

As she sped along, all but eight of the

crew were sent below, the two Spanish looking officers betook themselves to the cabin, and Captain Morte and his English lieutenant discarding their uniforms for the dress of humble skippers, stood on deck together, watching the lights of the town as they drew nearer and nearer.

"She sails well in her disguise, Duval," said the pirate captain, admiringly, to his lieutenant.

"She does, indeed, senor; but you do not think it possible to be recognized?"

"No, indeed, for how can we, as from a lateen rig we have become a schooner."

"It is true we have remarkably short lower masts and tall topmasts, but that will hardly be noticed, especially at night."

"Still, even if we were recognized, and had to fight for it, I would run into yonder port this night, for I have other work to do there than to capture the brig," and the captain began to pace to and fro in deep thought, until suddenly roused from his reverie by the stirring cry of:

"Sail ho!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIRATE IN PORT.

THE pirate captain did not start at the cry from the lookout at the mast-head, as the others on the vessel's deck did, for they were ever on the alert to hear the words that announced danger or gold to them.

Turning his face toward the lookout, Captain Morte called out, in an easy tone:

"Whereaway, sir?"

"Dead ahead, sir."

"How heading?"

"Coming toward us, sir, and out of the harbor."

"Ay, ay, keep your eyes upon her, and let me know what you make of her."

A few moments after the lookout hailed the deck.

"Ay, ay," called back the outlaw captain.

"She is a large barque, and looks like a merchantman, as well as I can make her out."

"She may be a valuable prize, but we dare not board her now; but I will pass near, to find out what she is," and the captain gave an order to his helmsman.

It was evident that the barque did not desire to avoid the stranger, but held on her course, and the glass soon showed that she was crowded with men, while port-holes were in her sides.

"By Neptune, but I believe she is sent out to capture my vessel, having been hastily manned and armed for that purpose," cried the pirate captain.

"Will you run from her, senor, as we have no guns on deck?"

"No, indeed, Duval, for why should an honest-looking craft like ours run from anything but a pirate?" and the young outlaw laughed lightly.

"There, she shows a desire to come nearer, so keep your helm up a little, helmsman, as I have no desire to avoid her."

The course the two vessels were now steering soon brought them near to each other, and each could be distinctly seen with the naked eye.

"The barque is crowded with men, and, as I thought, is after us," said the pirate chief, and, springing upon the bulwarks, he shouted out, in a voice that every ear on the stranger heard:

"Ho, the barque, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay!" came in hoarse tones from on board the schooner.

"We have been chased in by a pirate, and he now lies a few leagues in our wake."

"Ay, ay, he is the fellow we are looking after, if he carries lateen sails."

"He does, and is a West Indian, and sails like the wind."

"All right, and thank you; but what schooner is that?"

"The Nestor, out of Bangor. What barque is that?" was the prompt response and question.

"The Helen Hayward, armed and manned to run down that red pirate," came floating faintly back over the waters, and the young pirate sprang to the deck again with a light laugh, while he murmured:

"The Helen Hayward, eh? Well, this is strange, and doubtless an omen of good luck."

Going to the side of the helmsman, Cap-

tain Morte gave him a few orders how to steer, as though he was familiar with the channel, and, to the hail of a man in a small smack passing near, whether he wanted a pilot in to an anchorage, called back:

"No, thank you, for we have one on board."

When the schooner reached the harbor the chief took the helm himself and ran up to an anchorage not twenty fathoms from where the brig he had chased in lay quietly upon the waters.

"Lower away a boat for me," he said, quietly, as the anchor was let fall.

The boat, with two oarsmen, was soon alongside, and taking his seat in the stern, Captain Morte steered straight to the brig.

A mate leaned over the bulwarks, half-asleep, and hailed the boat as the splash of the oars awakened him.

"Ay, ay, sir; but is this the brig the West Indian pirate ran into port this afternoon?"

"It is the very craft."

"We were also chased in by him and barely escaped as it was."

"Well, I hope you'll have the satisfaction of seeing the pirates strung up to-morrow, for a race-horse craft has gone after her."

"We met her as we came in; but did she take crew enough?"

"Yes, for she drew on all the vessels in port for a man or two, and our captain went with all but four of his crew."

"I hope they'll catch him; but I've got to row on shore, and when I come back would be glad to have you go on board of my schooner and drink to the success of the barque's cruise."

"I've got some mighty good rum aboard."

"Oh, I'll go with pleasure, and thank you; but how long before you come back?" and the man spoke with a zest that showed that rum had its attractions for him.

"I cannot tell exactly; but I'll return as soon as I can," and the boat went on its way toward the shore.

Landing at a deserted pier, the pirate captain bade his men await him there, and hastily went on his way up into the town.

A short walk brought him to a tavern, and as he stepped into the light tap-room, it could be seen that his face was concealed by a dark beard, while he wore on his head a slouch hat that shaded his eyes.

Behind the bar stood a stout, red-faced man, serving drinks to his patrons, to whom a pretty waitress was handing them.

"Good-evening, shipmate; be seated, for there is a table all to yourself, and name your drink."

"Will it be rum, gin, or a mug of ale?" said the host to the new-comer.

"It will be a bottle of your best wine, served in your private parlor, and I will drink it with you, Captain Tom Bowline," was the low response of the pirate, as he leaned upon the bar and turned his dark eyes full in the face of the man he addressed.

The tavern-keeper started, glanced into the eyes of the pirate, and answered in an earnest tone:

"If my ears don't deceive me, that voice belongs to one who left this town three years ago with a gallows around his neck."

"Correct, Captain Tom, I am that one, so leave your carousers to your pretty bar-maid to serve, and let us have that bottle of wine," and Captain Morte walked on to a small door and entering it disappeared from view, while a moment after the innkeeper followed him with a strange look upon his face.

CHAPTER V.

THE OUTLAW LOVER.

"WELL, well! who ever expected to see you again in this town, Master Rupert?" cried the keeper of the Messmates' Anchorage Inn, as he entered the little private parlor, where his visitor had preceded him, and placed a bottle and glasses upon the table before him.

"Did I not tell you I would come back, Tom?"

"Yes, but I—"

"Yes, but you believed that I would not and that you would never see the five hundred dollars you spent on me to save me from the gallows, and just put it down as a debt paid to me for saving your life one night."

"No, Master Rupert, I do not consider that debt paid, for I will never forget you for saving me that night from death, when those sailors attacked me to get my gold."

"You were a wild boy, and you ran through your fortune and got into trouble, from being too ready with a weapon; but I would not see you die, so bought you out of jail, and thought I would see you no more; but what a beard you have grown."

"It is false, Tom, false as my friends were to me in my adversity—see!"

He took off the beard, and Captain Tom said thoughtfully, as though speaking aloud:

"The same handsome, dare-devil face, though older than when he went away."

"Yes, I am older and wiser, Tom; but here are the five hundred dollars you spent on me," and he threw a purse filled with gold upon the table.

"Bless you, Master Rupert, not one dollar of it will I take."

"Oh, yes, you will, for I am not a poor man now, Tom, for I have made my fortune."

"I am glad of that; but how did you make it?"

"With my sword."

"Ha! and under what flag?" cried the innkeeper, quickly.

"A sable one, Tom," was the reply, with a reckless laugh.

"You have then turned pirate, Master Rupert?"

"Yes, Tom, I was driven to it, for I became a wanderer, fell in with outlaws, and worked my way up to the quarter-deck of a West Indian buccaneer craft."

"By Heaven! but a West Indian pirate chased a brig into port to-day, and a barque has gone out to capture her."

"Yes, it was my lugger that ran her in, and I spoke the barque going out," was the cool reply.

"But did they not recognize you?"

"No indeed, for I disguised my craft as I did myself, and came into port."

"Reckless as ever, Master Rupert."

"It is my nature, Captain Tom; but take your gold, for I have plenty, and now tell me of my mother."

"You broke her heart, Master Rupert, for folks said you had turned pirate, and it killed her—yes, sir, your mother is dead."

The young pirate's head drooped forward and rested in his hands for a moment, as though the words of Captain Tom Bowline had cut deep; but after a while he raised his head and asked calmly:

"And there is one other, Tom, I would ask about."

"Your old ladylove?"

"Yes."

"She is living, sir."

"Is she married?"

"No, sir."

"Thank God for that," was the fervent response.

"But they do say she is to marry a poor University student, when she could have gotten any one of the rich young bloods that are in love with her."

"She shall never marry mortal man other than myself, Tom Bowline," was the fierce rejoinder of the young pirate chief, and dashing off the last glass of wine, he arose quickly and continued:

"Well, Tom, I will see you again, and if not to-night you will hear from me to-morrow."

"Good-night."

He grasped the hand of the innkeeper, and unheeding his words of warning, replaced his false beard and walked rapidly out of the tavern.

As though the town was perfectly familiar to him he walked along the streets at a quick pace, turning here and there until he came to where were the residences of the wealthiest citizens.

One of these, the most elegant house in the town, was slightly more isolated than the others, and was situated upon a hill overlooking the harbor and the sea.

Around it were ornamental grounds, with beds of flowers, and here and there a rustic arbor as a retreat for idlers to while away the time in the sultry noonday.

Passing through a gate he boldly approached the mansion, and wending his steps toward one wing, paused as he reached a small piazza.

A full-length window led into a cosy sitting-room that was brightly lighted, and pacing to and fro, her head drooped, her hands clasped before her and hanging listlessly down was a maiden of rare beauty.

The pirate chief paused a moment and gazed upon her as though spell-bound; but with a haughty toss of his head he sprang lightly upon the piazza, drew off his beard and hat, replacing the latter with a tarpaulin, and said softly:

"Helen!"

She started at the sound of the voice, bent her head toward the window, and stood in the attitude of listening.

"No, no; it was but the echo of a voice long since vanished, that seemed to come to me because I was thinking of *him* and the past."

"No, Helen, its no echo of a voice that has vanished, but Rupert Mortimer himself who speaks to you."

He threw aside the cloak he wore, and stepped boldly into the room, clad in his pirate uniform.

Helen Hayward started back with a cry of surprise and sorrow commingled; but, as he approached as though to take her hand, she shrunk away a step, and drawing herself up to her full height, cried in haughty tones:

"Stand back, Sir Pirate, for your own red hands broke the chain of love that once bound me to you, and now I regard you only with horror and contempt!"

"Ha! these are my words of greeting from you, proud beauty?"

"But I will lower your haughty head!" cried the pirate chief, and with a bound he was by her side, his arm grasping her waist, and one hand held firmly upon her mouth to prevent an outcry.

But poor Helen was so taken by surprise, and filled with dread, by his sudden act, that she lost her presence of mind, and sunk unconscious into the arms of the bold intruder.

"Ah! she has swooned, and fortune favors me."

"Now to take the nearest way to the shore," and the pirate captain raised the maiden in his powerful arms, threw his cloak over her and left the mansion, wending his way out of the grounds by a gate that led toward the harbor shore.

Swiftly he walked down the sloping path, and at last reached the shore where several small row-boats were moored.

Into one of these he placed Helen, and seizing the oars had just started off from the shore when the maiden returned to consciousness and gave one long, piercing cry.

"Great God! I will have a score of boats after me if she repeats that cry."

"I must be rude with you, Helen," and he turned toward her.

But the cry had already been heard, for out from the shadow of the hill bounded a tall form, and, springing into a light skiff, he sent it flying over the waters in chase of the pirate, who, endeavoring to quiet Helen by threats, did not see the stranger until the two boats came together with a crash, and a strong arm grasped him, while in hoarse tones came the words:

"Hold, sir! I will take that lady into my charge!"

The speaker stood with one foot upon the gunwale of each boat, and grasped the pirate by the shoulder with one hand, while in the other he held a short knife.

Captain Morte was wholly at a disadvantage, for he was forced to hold Helen in one arm, while he endeavored to grasp a weapon with the other.

But he would not so easily surrender his prize, and hissed back:

"Never, sir, and I warn you off."

"Then it is your life or mine," was the ringing response of the man who had attacked the pirate chief.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

WITH Helen Hayward the object of contention between her outlaw lover, Rupert Mortimer, on the one hand, and her student lover, Frank Shields, upon the other, a struggle to the death would certainly have followed the attempted rescue of the maiden, had not the quick ear of the pirate detected the stroke of oars, and his eyes fallen upon a

boat containing several men rowing hastily to the scene.

Captain Morte was brave to recklessness, but he knew that the odds were terribly against him, and that his capture meant certain death at the gallows when he was recognized, so he at once determined to save himself and trust to fortune to aid him in kidnapping Helen Hayward at another time.

To the amazement of the daring student, and the joy of Helen, neither of whom saw the coming boat, and expected desperate resistance after his bold words, he suddenly held the maiden before him as a shield from the attack of Frank Shields and sprang backward into the sea.

The act nearly dragged Helen overboard after him, but she was seized by her lover's strong grasp just in time to save her, and the next instant the coming boat dashed up to the scene and a cheery voice cried:

"What's the trouble, messmate?"

"A man attempted to kidnap this lady, and I was fortunate enough to thwart him," was the modest reply of the student.

"Who was he, and where is he? for we will make short work of him," said the speaker in the boat.

"He stood his ground until he saw your approach, and then sprang overboard."

"I hope he has not been drowned, for that would cheat the gallows."

"But we will look him up while you take charge of the lady," said the one who seemed so be the leader among the boat's crew.

"Thank you, sir," answered Frank Shields, and seizing the oars he sent the boat quickly to the shore.

All this time Helen Hayward had uttered no word, but sat in the stern of the boat clinging to the hand of her preserver.

She was very pale, for it had been a great shock to her to recognize in her kidnapper one who had won her heart just as she had crossed the threshold of her teens, but whose life had been one of reckless dissipation and crime.

After his mysterious escape from prison he had fled for parts unknown; but there were seamen who knew him well who had reported that they had seen him on the deck of a pirate vessel that had boarded them, and this had reached the ears of his poor mother, and the shock had hastened the end of her life.

Helen, too, had heard these stories, but hoped that he had not become as bad as that; but bad as he was, she could not wholly obliterate his image from her heart, and her thoughts were of the desperate wanderer when he so suddenly appeared before her, and with a result which the reader has seen.

It had not been the expectation of Captain Morte, as he called himself after raising the black flag, to kidnap Helen that night.

He had wished to see her, and believing that she still loved him, or would return to her allegiance at sight of him, he hoped to lay a plan to have her fly with him at a time which he would set.

Her horror at seeing him, her scorn, caused him to act with the impulse of his nature, and which impulsiveness had gotten him into trouble from boyhood, and he had boldly carried her off.

Seeing that the game was against him, knowing that his men were not near to aid him, and not wishing to ruin all by a combat in which he had to face such great odds, he at once relinquished his prize and sprang backward into the sea.

Sinking from sight, and a skillful swimmer, he remained long under the water, rising only for breath at a considerable distance from the boat.

He heard the words of the student and those in the boat, and muttered:

"The fellow is modest not to preach himself up; but the tide is against me in winning that prize to-night, so I must strive for another."

So saying, he again dove, swimming under water in the direction he wished to go, and thus continuing until he reached a safe distance from the boats, when he swam on deliberately with a strong stroke along the deserted piers, and nearly frightened his two men to death by suddenly appearing alongside of them.

"Silence, you idiots, and help me into the boat," he cried, sternly, as the two Mexican seamen began to mutter prayers at sight of

him, to keep off, as they believed, an evil spirit from the deep.

Recognizing the voice of their chief, they put their hands to better use than crossing themselves, and soon had him in the boat.

"Now give way with a will, lads," was the order, as the pirate captain took his seat in the stern and seized the tiller-ropes.

Away went the boat, straight for the brig, over the bulwarks of which hung the mate, anxiously looking for the return of the one who had promised him a treat.

"Well, messmate, I am ready to have you go aboard with me now, and if I don't give you some of the best liquor you ever put in your mouth, you can set me down as a land-lubber," said the pirate captain, as his boat ran alongside of the brig.

"Ay, ay, I'll be with you in a second."

"Here, bo'sen, hold the deck until my return," and the mate went with alacrity over the side, and dropped into the pirate's boat.

"Give way, men," said Captain Morte, and, as the boat moved off, he continued:

"You see how wet I am?"

"Yes."

"I made a misstep and went off of the wharf; but here we are, and you are welcome on board."

The mate followed the pirate into his cabin, little dreaming of going into a tiger's den in that peaceful harbor, and sunk into an easy-chair, while he gazed about him with considerable admiration at the elegance of everything around.

"You have handsome quarters here, captain?"

"Yes, the craft was built for a privateer, and my owners bought her for the service they wished to put her in, and so left everything as it was."

"What trade are you in, captain?"

"The free trade," was the laconic reply.

"What is the free trade?"

"Taking cargoes wherever I can get them."

"Ah, yes, running the coast for cargoes from port to port?"

"Yes, that is about it; but here is some of my best liquor, and I do not wish you to be modest in drinking it."

"By the way, you might take a bottle or two back with you to your vessel to your captain."

"You are very good; but I do not think he will return for a day or two, as they intended to push the pirate hard."

"I hope they will; but did he take all of his crew with him?"

"All excepting myself, the bo'sen and four seamen."

"Well, you don't need many men on board in port; but excuse me a moment."

Captain Morte left the cabin, and going on deck he said to his English lieutenant:

"Duval, order eight good men into the boat alongside, two at the oars and the others lying in the bottom so as to be concealed."

"When ready come into the cabin and run that fellow through the back with your sword as he sits at the table with me."

"Captain Morte, like yourself, I do not care to strike a man in the back, so let me get your boat ready, while I call Senor Riaz to do the red work you wish done," said the lieutenant.

"As you please, Duval," was the indifferent response of Captain Morte, as he returned to the cabin and took his seat at the table with his victim.

The mate was already beginning to feel the liquor he had drunk, for he had lost no time during the absence of the pirate, and said in a maudlin tone:

"Now let me sing you a song, cap'n, one that smacks of salt water."

"I would be delighted to hear it, sir, so take a bumper of this wine and begin," was the cool reply.

The doomed man dashed off the glass of wine, cleared his throat, and was just beginning his song, when his words rung out into a shriek, as a slender blade was driven through his body.

Grasping the point of the weapon as it protruded from his breast, he tried to force it back out of the wound; but a firmer hand held the hilt behind him, and a sinister, dark face smiled at the act, while Captain Morte said in a tone of perfect nonchalance:

"The senor must die, for my lieutenant's

blade is through your heart, and he is more than delighted to give you your death-wound."

Calmly in front of his victim Captain Morte sat as he spoke, an unruffled expression upon his face, and one hand toying with his glass on the table, the other daintily holding a cigar.

With a groan, the poor man sunk forward upon the table, breaking the glasses in fragments, while Captain Morte said calmly:

"You did your work like an expert in assassination, Riaz."

"Thank you, senor," was the cool response of the lieutenant, as he withdrew his sword from the body of his victim and left the cabin with the air of a man who had done a deed that was most agreeable to him.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN MORTE'S TRIUMPH.

LEAVING his murdered guest where he had fallen across the table, Captain Morte went on deck and found the boat and crew awaiting him.

"Riaz did the work well, Duval," he said to his English lieutenant, who stood at the gangway.

"I thought he would, senor, as he is a natural-born cut-throat," answered the lieutenant.

"Now stand ready with the crew to get the vessel under way and follow the brig out to sea, for in ten minutes she will be my prize," and Captain Morte went over the side into the boat, which at once headed for the brig.

"Ho that boat!" called out the bo'sen, as he saw the boat coming alongside.

"Your mate drank too much liquor and we are bringing him on board drunk, and the captain sends a bottle for you," was the reply of Captain Morte.

"Your captain is a gentleman, messmate, to get the mate drunk and send me a bottle."

"Come alongside, and I'll stow the mate in his bunk and the liquor I will drink to the health of all your crew," and the unsuspecting boatswain stepped to the gangway to suddenly fall dead from a blow on the head when a cutlass fell with terrific force, held in the hand of Captain Morte.

A seaman forward, leaning half-asleep against the capstan was the next victim, and descending stealthily into the steerage the remainder of the brig's crew fell victims to the red work of the pirates.

"Up with that anchor, lads!" came the order from the pirate chief as he stepped to the wheel, and as half of the men manned the capstan, others began to set sail, so that the captured vessel was soon moving through the waters.

Hardly had she left her anchorage when the pirate craft in her wake began to follow, and silently the two vessels glided seaward, the bold act seen by no one who suspected the daring deed of the pirate in their very midst.

Once out of the harbor and Captain Morte hailed his own vessel and ordered her to come to, at the same time bringing the brig up into the wind.

Taking a boat he boarded the schooner, and after receiving the congratulations of his officers, he said:

"Senor Duval, I wish you to board the brig and take charge of her, while Lieutenant Riaz will command this vessel."

"You are both to sail to Smuggler's Inlet, on the coast below, and there arm the brig with the armament of this vessel, which I will then set fire to and burn, for she is getting pretty well used up."

"And you, Senor Captain?"

"I shall return in the dinghy to the town."

"You run a great risk, sir."

"So I did to-night, yet got through all right, thanks to my lucky star."

"But I have some work to do there, and, as soon as it is attended to, I shall join you at Smugglers' Inlet."

"Should anything cause you to leave there keep in the vicinity, for there I will come to search for you."

"I will obey your orders, senor."

"I know that, Duval, for I trust you fully knowing that I can do so, though you are a little tender-hearted for a man who sails under the black flag."

"But now I must be off, as I wish to reach the town before dawn," and ten minutes

after, while his vessel and her prize were swiftly standing seaward Captain Morte was sailing alone in his little boat, back to the town where he had passed his boyhood days in honor, to bring disgrace upon his riper years by crime.

Up the silent harbor went the little boat until she ran in toward a dilapidated pier which Captain Morte knew that few persons frequented.

Landing, he furled his little sail, and making the boat fast, proceeded to the Messmates' Anchorage just as dawn was breaking.

The bar of the inn opened always at an early hour, to accommodate thirsty souls after a night of debauch, and Captain Tom had just thrown open his doors when the pirate chief stepped up with a pleasant good-morning.

"Ho, Master Ru—"

"I am known as Captain Morte now, Tom," was the quick response of the young outlaw.

"Well, it is a better name than your own to bear in these parts; but there is a pirate who floats it too."

"I am the one, Tom; but come, I want secret quarters with you for a while, and more, I want your advice and aid, so surrender your bar to your pretty maid for a few days and devote yourself to me, for there is more money in it for you than you can make selling liquors in a month."

"I'm your man, sir, so come in at once and take a few hours' sleep before breakfast, for I know you have not been abed during the past night."

"No, I have not; but I have done some good work, as you will doubtless hear before long."

"But come, show me my room, and let me have the best breakfast you can furnish when you call me, which you need not do until nine o'clock."

"Then breakfast with me in my room, for I do not wish to be seen, and I'll tell you what work I have ahead."

"I'll do it, Mas— I mean captain, so come with me and I'll show you the best my house affords."

Captain Morte followed his host into the house, and soon was made comfortable in a really delightful room.

Throwing himself upon the bed, he was soon fast asleep, seemingly unmindful of the pricking of a conscience, but happy in having triumphed in his unholy plot thus far.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INSULT.

THE fortunate presence of the young student, Frank Shields, upon the scene, and his brave rescue of Helen Hayward, can be accounted for by the fact that he always made it a rule to take a walk after several hours of hard work at his studies, and his steps naturally led him toward the home of the one whom he so dearly loved.

He saw Captain Morte enter the grounds of the mansion, and wondered who he could be, and naturally his jealous mind asked the question:

"Is he going to see Helen?"

He passed on toward the little promenade that overlooked the harbor, and soon beheld a man come out of the Hayward grounds, bearing what he at first believed to be a huge bundle in his arms.

The man passed near him in the darkness, but did not see the student, and some uncontrollable impulse led him to slowly follow him down the hill pathway toward the harbor shore.

"Surely he cannot be a burglar at this early hour," muttered the student.

And then, as he saw that the load was evidently no light one to carry, he said, half-aloud:

"It looks as though it might be a human being he has in his arms."

All doubts on this score were soon set aside by the cry of Helen Hayward for help, as soon as she recovered from her swoon and recognized where she was.

"Oh, God! I know that voice."

"It is Helen's!"

The words broke hoarsely from the lips of the student, and he bounded forward to the rescue, with a result already known to the reader.

When he landed with the maiden, after

her rescue, he placed his arm about her and led her slowly back toward the mansion, while she repeated, over and over again:

"Frank, I owe you my life for the second time."

At last he asked her:

"Do you think he meant to kill you, Helen?"

She started at the question, and turning full upon him asked, in an earnest tone:

"Do you know who that man was, Frank?"

"I do not, I assure you."

"Do you suspect his motive in bearing me off?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Your father is rich, and he expected a rich ransom for your restoration."

"No, Frank."

"Ah! had he other motive?"

"Yes."

"I am at a loss to know what it could be."

"You have heard me speak once to you of Rupert Mortimer?"

"The unfortunate fellow who ran through his fortune and committed murder?"

"Yes."

"I remember your speaking of him to me."

"I did, for when you asked me if I had ever loved any one, I told you that my girlhood heart had gone out to Rupert Mortimer, and that though he had dishonored himself, I could never forget how good and kind he had ever been to me."

"Well, Frank, that man who carried me off to night was Rupert Mortimer."

"Great Heaven! can this be true, Helen?"

"It is true."

"They say that Mortimer turned to piracy."

"Yes, so it is said, and so I believe, for to-night when he came to the mansion and threw aside his cloak and hat, I saw that he wore a uniform that certainly belongs not to any navy."

"He asked me to fly with him, and I scorned him, and, swooning away, he bore me off."

"Now, Frank, you know from whom, and from what you have saved Helen Hayward."

They had now reached the piazza of the mansion, and found Mr. Hayward, his wife, and several servants anxiously searching for Helen.

Seeing her, and noting who it was that accompanied her, Mr. Hayward advanced with angry face and mien, while he said, sternly:

"Helen, you have alarmed your mother and myself greatly by your absence, and I regret, exceedingly, to find that you have been out walking at night with a person whom I have once refused to accept as a suitor for the hand of my daughter, and whom I now peremptorily forbid to enter my house."

"Father, you are cruelly unjust and unkind toward both Mr. Shields and myself, for I did not leave this house in company with him, but was kidnapped by a pirate, from whom this gentleman, whom you have insulted, has just rescued me."

"Bah! this is some romantic nonsense on your part to curry favor for that pauper student, Helen, and I—"

"Father, how dare you speak to me thus, accusing me of stooping to falsehood and petty tricks to gain favor for a man in your eyes whose worth I do not believe you are able to appreciate?"

Helen spoke with just and indignant anger, and her father was quite taken aback by her manner and words, for he had never seen her in a passion before, and he wished not to arouse her still further, so he said:

"Do you mean, Helen, that you were really kidnapped from your home to-night?"

"I do, sir."

"When?"

"Half an hour ago, sir, while I was in my sitting-room, a man entered by the piazza door and bore me off."

"Why did you not cry for aid, as you know that—"

"Father, when I recognized who the intruder was and heard his words, I swooned away and he bore me off."

"He! you recognized him, then?"

"I did, sir."

"In Heaven's name tell me who he was and he shall suffer for this."

"Father, you are powerless to punish him, for the man is a pirate."

"Good God! can you mean this?" and Mr. Hayward leaned against the hall door for support, while Mrs. Hayward uttered a scream and sunk down into a piazza chair.

"I do mean it, father."

"What! can that pirate who chased my brig in have run into port, while the barque has gone off on a fool's errand in search of him?"

"I do not know, sir, whether the pirate who chased your brig into port, and the one who carried me off, are one and the same; but I do know that the man who kidnapped me is now known as a buccaneer."

"But you say you recognized him?"

"I did."

"Oh, Helen! do you know any pirates?" cried Mrs. Hayward, almost unnerved by all she had heard.

"Yes, mother, I am so unfortunate as to have an acquaintance with one pirate, as you will know when I tell you that it was Rupert Mortimer."

Mrs. Hayward screamed at this, and Mr. Hayward swore, while, as Helen sprung to her mother's side, Frank Shields took advantage of the scene of excitement to beat a retreat, his face burning with the insult that the father of the maiden he loved had cast upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THREAT.

THE morning following the night upon which the scenes just related transpired, Frank Shields sat alone in his humble student quarters, hard at work with his books.

He looked happier than had been his wont of late, for he felt joy at having a second time saved the one idol of his heart from some dread danger.

The insult of Mr. Hayward had cut him deeply; but then he felt that Helen loved him, and that was more than half the battle won.

He realized fully that he was poor; but his own heart told him that his poverty was not criminal, and though left a fortune at the death of his father, he had been robbed of it by one he had loved and trusted, one that was then living in luxury while he toiled for a living.

He knew well that he could put the one who had thus stolen his birthright behind the bars of a prison; but he had suffered in silence, not wishing to punish the one who so richly deserved it, and manfully struck out in the world to win his own way to fortune.

A few books, a meager wardrobe, and just enough money to take him through the University was all he had.

But he was in perfect health, he stood at the head of his class, and he would soon have a profession, and then he hoped that he would be able to claim Helen as his bride.

She knew him as he had been, and as he was, and she realized fully that he loved her for herself and was no fortune-seeker.

Then thoughts of the past with hopes for the future flitted through the student's mind as he sat alone in his little room.

Presently a knock at the door aroused him, and to his summons to enter, a boy came in, bearing a note in his hand.

"Is this Mr. Shields?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy."

"Here is a note was given to me to bring to you, sir."

He grasped the note and found that it was addressed in Helen's handwriting.

"Ah! thank you; here is sixpence for you," he said, eagerly, while his face flushed with pleasure.

"The pretty lady paid me, sir; she gave me half a dollar."

"Well, keep that too; but let me see if there is an answer."

"She said you was to say yes or no."

He broke the seal and read:

"DEAR FRANK:—"

"Come to the Sea View Gate and meet me as soon as you can. Yours, HELEN."

"Yes, is my answer, my boy," said Frank Shields, and the young messenger departed delighted at his luck in getting pay at both ends of the line.

Hastily putting on his best suit, for he

was in his "everyday clothes," Frank departed from the University to meet at the gate a young man whom he recognized as one of Mr. Hayward's clerks.

"I have a note for you, Mr. Shields," he said.

Frank looked surprised, and breaking the seal glanced at the contents.

It read simply:

"Will Mr. Frank Shields oblige Mr. Horace Hayward with an interview at his office this A. M., to talk over a matter that can be arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned?"

"Kindly say to Mr. Hayward that I will be there before noon," and Frank hastened away, his heart full of joy, for the tenor of Mr. Hayward's note certainly seemed to predict an acceptance of his suit for Helen's hand.

"His heart has relented toward me," he said, as he hastened along to the rendezvous where he was to meet Helen.

He found her awaiting him in the little arbor overlooking the sea, and which was situated in one of the most secluded parts of the extensive grounds surrounding the Hayward mansion.

From a gate near the arbor led a path down to the water, and which had been the one taken by Captain Morte when bearing Helen away the night before.

"You see I am surveying the scene of my adventure and your bravery last night, Frank," said Helen, in her low, rich tones, grasping his hand as he approached.

"It is a pretty scene by day, Helen, and one I have ever loved."

"I often come along the path by night, in my strolls for exercise before retiring, and look toward the light in your window as a beacon of hope to me."

"Prettily said, Sir Student, but I have sent for you to have a talk with you about last night, for I was deeply hurt at father's unkind words, and spoke to him about it this morning."

"What was the result, Helen?"

"He told me that he would see you to-day and arrange satisfactorily with you, was his reply, and more I could not get him to say; but I hope that he will be content to allow you the right which is justly yours, as we love each other, of becoming the acknowledged suitor for my hand."

"I hope so sincerely, Helen, and I just received this note from your father."

She read it and said:

"His expressions to you are as vague as his words were to me; but I shall hope for the best, and I wish you to feel that, come what may, I am true to you, and when you wish to claim me, you have but to come for me, Frank."

"God bless you, Helen, and I hope the day may not be far distant when I can do so."

Helen was about to reply, when a quick step was heard coming along the garden walk, and the words came to her lips:

"Father!"

"Yes, Helen, I had written to have Mr. Shields come to my office to have a talk with me, but learning from my messenger that he left him coming toward my house, I hastened here expecting to meet him."

"Yes, father, I sent for Mr. Shields to tell him that I hoped he would forgive your unkind words last night to him, after his noble service to your daughter," was Helen's response.

"Yes, I was unkind last night, and I hope that Mr. Shields will overlook my words, while, for his services, I wish to offer him a suitable reward."

"You are poor, young man, and find it hard struggling through your student life, so I have here a little sum that I wish to press upon you to accept."

"Mr. Hayward," and Frank's face flushed with anger as he spoke:

"I am not one, sir, to accept money for serving the woman I love, and although I am poor, very poor, I am surprised that you would insult me by the offer."

Mr. Hayward was angry; that was evident, and he said hotly:

"Oh, yes, you cast aside the few thousands that I offer you, hoping to get my daughter and my fortune."

"Your daughter, sir, I hope to win as my wife; your money I care not for."

"You shall never have her, sir, for I shall

marry her off to Louis Vale, a young man her equal in wealth, society and every way worthy of her."

Frank Shields's fine face turned very pale at this, but he said calmly:

"Mr. Hayward, your daughter will never be the wife of Louis Vale."

"Ha! is this a threat? I shall have to warn Vale that an assassin is on his track."

"Father!" cried Helen, indignantly; but her emotion was too great for her to say more, and raising his hat politely, Frank Shields walked away.

CHAPTER X.

ASSASSINS AT WORK.

"SAY, my man, you look as though the world had gone rough with you."

The speaker was a handsome young man, attired in the fashionable suit of a University student, and carried a cane in his hand, while he wore a watch and a diamond ring.

He was strolling along the shore, in a grove not far from the Hayward mansion, and came suddenly upon a seaman, with iron-gray hair and beard, and whose ragged attire did look as though fortune had avoided him.

"Truth, your honor, luck is ag'in' me," answered the sailor, saluting politely.

"Well, I can tell you how you can make the price of a meal."

"For Heaven's sake tell me, young gentleman," eagerly said the old seaman.

"Do you see that handsome house, yonder?"

"Oh, yes, for my eyes are good yet, if I have logged nearly fifty years in the voyage of life."

"Well, do you see that rustic arbor at this end of the grounds?"

"I do."

"In that arbor is a lady."

"There must be a lover near, then, sir?"

"There is; he is with her."

"I see."

"I wish to see him."

"Yes, sir."

"You wait here until you see him leave the grounds by that gate, and then tell him that a fellow-student of his has fallen at the Crag and lamed himself a little, and wishes him to come and help him home."

"Yes, sir; but will it not be better for us to go at once to his aid?"

"My, man, there is no student there."

"Oh, I see," said the sailor, with a sly wink.

"I wish to meet him there."

"Oh, ho! a rival, I guess?"

"Just that."

"Perhaps you would like to make enough money to keep you a year or so?"

"Would a sailor refuse his grog, sir?"

"But you will have to work for it."

"I am not afraid of work, sir."

"Are you particular as to the kind of work you do?"

"It depends upon the price."

"Ah! you are ready to do any work according to the pay?"

"I am."

"Suppose it is to use a knife?"

"Knife or powder, it is all the same to me."

"I see that you are just my man."

"I am, if there is money to be made, young gentleman."

"Are you a drinking man?"

"I take my grog when I want it."

"But when the grog's in the wit's out, and a man may talk under such circumstances."

"I never talk, sir, and I never let grog get the upper hand."

"Do you know the Crag above here at the shore?"

"What they call the Point o' Rocks?"

"Yes."

"I know the spot."

"Do you live here?"

"No, sir, only ashore and out of a berth."

"Very well, I want you to serve me and I will pay you."

"What is to be done?"

"Can you use a pistol?"

"I have done so."

"Are you afraid to do so again?"

"Not if I am paid for it."

"What is a life worth to you?"

"What is the risk I run to take it?" was the cool question of the old sailor.

"None, whatever."

"Then I might do the work cheap."

"What do you call cheap?"

"Say several hundred."

"I will give you two hundred and fifty dollars."

"I'll do it."

"Then it is a bargain, and I wish you to wait the coming of the gentleman from yonder garden."

"Yes."

"Tell him that a student who has hurt himself at the Crag wishes him to come there for him."

"I hear you."

"Then you follow him, come upon us while we are talking, and shoot him down."

"Have you a weapon for the work?"

"Yes, here is his own pistol, which a gunsmith who has just repaired it for him asked me to deliver to him," and the student took from his pocket a handsome weapon of the old-time dueling class.

It was silver-mounted and had engraved upon it the following:

"TO MY SON, FRANK SHIELDS.

MAY IT SERVE HIM AS WELL AS IT HAS HIS FATHER."

"This is a pretty weapon," said the sailor.

"Yes, and should do good work; now, here is a roll of bills which I just drew from the bank for my own use, but which I pay to you willingly for the work I wish done."

"When you have finished your task I will pay you the balance."

"Now I go to the Crag, and I expect you to send Frank Shields there, and to follow him."

"I will do so, sir," was the reply of the sailor, who quietly took up his position to await the coming of Frank Shields, who little dreamed of the plot against his life.

A few moments only had the sailor to wait, and then Frank Shields came out of the garden gate and wended his steps at a quick pace along the pathway leading to the little grove.

As he approached, the sailor stepped out into the pathway and confronted the young student, whose face was very pale and eyes flashing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STUDENT'S TREACHERY.

As Frank Shields left the garden of Horace Hayward, after the unpleasant scene between that gentleman and himself, he caught sight of the old sailor halting by the wayside.

The young student was in no enviable mood, as may be supposed, and was walking along briskly, lost in his own angry reflections; but his was a nature ever ready to aid one in distress, and the sailor appeared to him, from his seedy dress and mien to be one deserving of charity.

As the sailor addressed him, Frank said quickly:

"Here, my man, this may help you a little," and he placed in his hand a small piece of silver.

"I thank your honor, sir; but are you a student from the University?"

"I am."

"Could you tell me how I could find Mr. Shields?"

"I am Frank Shields."

"Then you are the one I seek, sir."

"Indeed! how can I serve you, my man?"

"One of your fellow students, sir, has fallen at the Point o' Rocks above here, and sprained his ankle, and wants you to come there for him."

"Certainly, I will go; but who is it?"

"He gave me his name, sir, but I have forgotten it."

"Well, it does not matter, so long as he sent for me."

"I will go at once, and you can make a few pennies by hastening on to the University and having them send a vehicle for the poor fellow."

So saying, Frank Shields hastened on along the coast, and soon arrived at the Crag, or, as many called it, the Point of Rocks.

It was a desolate place, with no habitation within a quarter of a mile; but Frank knew the spot well, having often extended his walks thither, and several times walked there in company with Helen Hayward.

As he approached he saw no one, and so called out:

"Halloo!"

"Ay, ay! this way!" answered a voice up a small glen, and following the sound of the call, Frank Shields the next instant came upon Louis Vale seated upon a rock, and apparently nursing a wounded foot.

"Ah! it is you, Shields?" he said, with something of a sneer.

"Yes, and I did not expect to find you here, Vale; but as you seem to have suffered I will gladly do what I can for you," was the reply of Frank Shields.

The two had not spoken of late, for Louis Vale had snubbed the poor student ever since he had taken the honors of the class away from him, and hated him after finding that he was his successful rival for the hand of Helen Hayward.

Nursing that hatred, and fearful of losing both the maiden and her money, for his father had recently written him that he was in financial difficulties, Louis Vale determined to get rid of the man who stood in his way.

He did not wish to commit murder himself, and the thought struck him that the sailor would prove a willing tool.

He had thought of challenging Frank Shields to fight him; but the pluck of the poor student was well known, while he was a dead shot and skilled swordsman, his weapons being the most valuable property he possessed, and which he had reserved from his fortunes, wrecked by guardians who had proven false.

"I am glad to see you, Shields, for I wished to meet you and have a talk with you," said Louis Vale, as his fellow-student came to his side.

"Let me first see about your injury, and the carriage I hope will soon be here—"

"Ha! did you send for a vehicle?" quickly asked Louis Vale.

"Yes."

"By whom?" and Vale frowned.

"By the poor old sailor who brought me word that you had fallen and hurt yourself."

Louis Vale gave a sigh of relief, and responded:

"Now, Shields, never mind my ankle, for that is not the worst injury I have received."

"Indeed! I am really sorry, and you do look very pale."

"The other injury," the designing student went on, "is in my heart, and you have inflicted it."

Frank Shields now saw the drift of his fellow-student's words, and answered coldly:

"Well, Vale, we both strove for a prize and I won it."

"Had you been the winner I would have felt no ill-will against you, though I frankly admit, from what I know of your character, I would have given full pity to the lady."

"Ah! that is your tone, sir?"

"There is no need of my being double-faced, Vale, for it is not in my nature so to be."

"I am glad to hear you speak out, for it breaks the ice for me to say what I wish to you."

"Better select another time, Vale, when you are not suffering."

"To Satan with my suffering! See! it was a trick to get you here, for I am not in the least hurt," and the handsome young hypocrite sprung to his feet.

"You are certainly a baser man than I supposed you to be, Mr. Vale, and I am surprised that you felt it necessary to descend to trickery to gain an interview of any kind with me," and Frank Shields showed plainly in his face the contempt he felt for the man before him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD SAILOR'S DOUBLE PLOT.

"WELL, Shields, I wished to meet you where there were no witnesses or eavesdroppers, and I wish to settle now a question between us," said Louis Vale, in his sinister way.

"There is no question between us, Vale, that I can see."

"There is, for you have taken from me every prize since we have been in the University together."

"That is because I have spent my time in study, when you have been carousing," was the cool rejoinder.

"Had it not been for you I would to-day be first-honor man; and more, you have stolen from me the affections of the woman I love."

Frank Shields laughed lightly, and his rival asked in angry tones:

"Why do you laugh, sir?"

"I laugh at the thought that Louis Vale loves other than himself, and more, I am amazed that he accuses me of stealing from him that which I am confident he never possessed."

"Ha! you mean that Helen Hayward never loved me?"

"I do."

"By what right do you say so?"

"I have her own words for it."

"She would have done so but for you."

"She is fortunate in having escaped a fate so cruel."

"Sneer on, sir, for I care not; but should you be out of the way she would marry me."

"Heaven protect her from such a doom."

"Ay, and I now demand of you, Frank Shields, that you give her up."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Woe be unto you if you refuse."

"I care nothing for your threats."

"Say, Shields, you are a poor man, and I have money, so I will buy your claim if you will sell, for I do not wish to have to do worse."

"My claim is not for sale, sir, poor as I am."

"Then you will force me to extremes?" savagely said Louis Vale.

"Pray do not force me to extremes, Mr. Vale, as I am a man who thoroughly believes in the right of self-preservation," and the flashing eyes of the young student showed that he meant what he said.

"You refuse then to relinquish all claims to the hand of Miss Hayward?"

"Assuredly, and I am surprised that you deem me so weak as to think I can be frightened into so doing."

"Then, sir, you must take the consequences."

"Old man, do your red work!"

The last words were said in a low tone, and behind Frank Shields arose a form of the old sailor, and a pistol was in his hand.

The weapon was leveled, the finger touched the trigger, and the bullet went flying on its deadly errand.

At the last moment Louis Vale had seen that the weapon was not aimed at Frank Shields, but at him.

He had started back in horror, and there broke from his lips the cry:

"Great God! man, do you mean to kill me?"

Just then the pistol-shot came, and, with a bullet in his breast, Louis Vale sunk upon the ground.

Utterly astounded, Frank Shields sprung to his side without glancing around him to see where was the one who had fired the fatal shot.

"Great Heaven, Vale, you are dying."

"Yes, shipmate, he has his death-wound, and you shot him down without any reason that I can see."

The speaker stepped forward as he spoke, and it was the old sailor.

"Villain, what do you mean? You know that I did not fire that shot," cried Frank, excitedly.

"I seen yer do it, mate, and here is the weapon you did it with," and he picked up the pistol from where he had thrown it upon the ground.

Frank Shields was utterly unnerved by the accusation against him, and it was with an effort that he said appealingly to the dying man:

"You, Vale, know that I did not fire upon you?"

"Yes, murderer, you fired the shot that killed me," sternly said Louis Vale, his eyes flashing with hate.

"Yes, mate, he killed you, and I'll see that he hangs for the deed," said the old sailor, just as two men appeared upon the scene, guns in hand, for they had been upon a hunt through the woods.

They knew the two students by sight, and had heard the last words spoken, and one of them said quickly:

"This is a sad affair, gentlemen; but do you accuse Mr. Shields of having shot you, Mr. Vale?"

"I do, and that man holds his pistol, as you can see, for it has his name upon it."

"It is false! I did not fire upon him," cried Frank Shields.

"I believe that you did, sir, and we will take you prisoner; but who are you, sir?" and the huntsman who had spoken turned to the old sailor.

But before he could answer Louis Vale said in a low tone:

"He is an old sailor, that I met, as he was on his way to my quarters to find me, for he was sent by Frank Shields there to ask me to come here."

"I came, and as Mr. Shields and myself are rivals, he shot me."

Frank Shields stood like a statue, for this bold charge absolutely dazed him.

Recovering himself he stepped toward Louis Vale, to demand that he die not with a base falsehood upon his lips; but with a gasp and a groan the life fluttered out of the body of Louis Vale, and he lay dead before them, his last utterance a lie that he felt would bring punishment upon his hated rival.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER THE MURDER.

THE seaport town, wherein occurred the scenes narrated in the foregoing chapters, was still discussing the story of the mysterious flight of the brig, which had escaped the pirate so cleverly, when, like a bomb-shell bursting in the midst of the community, there came the startling tidings of the death of Louis Vale at the hands of Frank Shields, his fellow-student.

The two huntsmen, aided by the old sailor, had brought the body of Louis Vale and the prisoner to town, and the latter had quickly found lodgment in the village jail, while the rich young aristocrat was taken to his quarters to be prepared for burial.

Students and townspeople were horrified at the tragedy, when the stories of the huntsmen and the old sailor were told.

Of course no one believed the story of Frank Shields that he was innocent.

Yes, there was one who believed in his innocence, and that one was Helen Hayward.

On his way to prison the poor student had asked one of the hunters if he would deliver a note for him, and, being answered in the affirmative, he had written Helen Hayward as follows, as soon as he arrived in the jail:

"MY DEAR HELEN:—

"The bearer of this will explain to you my position as he knows it.

"But he is wrong, and I am the victim of a plot, for I am innocent of the charge of murdering poor Vale.

"He sent for me by an old sailor to meet him at the Crag.

"I went and while conversing with him he was shot, but by whom God only knows.

"He accused me of firing upon him, and such was his dying statement, while the old sailor picked up my pistol, which I had left days before with a gunsmith for repairs, and this appears as another link in the chain against me, as will also, I suppose, the remark I made to your father that Vale would never make you his wife, but in which remark I believe you know there was implied no threat of harm to him.

"Somehow I cannot but believe that the old sailor I referred to knows more of the affair than he is willing to tell.

"But certain it is that I am innocent, in spite of the circumstantial evidence against me, though I feel now that I will be proven guilty, and that my hopes of future happiness must set in the gloom of the gallows.

"Whether you believe me or not, Helen, you must feel that I am the same now as before, and will remember you with my last thought.

"I deem it my duty to write you this, that, no matter what is said against me, you may have it from me that I am guiltless. Yours,

"FRANK."

This note was handed personally to Helen by the young hunter, with whom she had a slight acquaintance, and he gave to her his version of the affair, and to his surprise she said very coldly:

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness, but Mr. Shields tells me in his note that he is innocent, and I cannot but believe him."

"But the facts, Miss Hayward," urged the young bearer.

"The facts, sir, Mr. Shields has given me, and from you I have heard the suspicions."

The young man felt that his wisest course was to withdraw, and he did so just as Mr. Hayward came home in hot haste to tell the story, as he had heard it with its numerous variations.

"Well, Helen, I have news for you that will make you change your opinion of that scapegrace Shields now," he said, excitedly.

"You refer, sir, to the death of Mr. Vale at the hand of an assassin, I suppose?" was the cold response.

"Ah! you have heard it, then?"

"Yes, sir, I just learned the news."

"But who could have told you?" and Mr. Hayward was disappointed at not being the first to break the tidings.

"I have here a letter from Mr. Shields."

"Ha! he has dared to write you after his cold-blooded act?"

"He has committed no cold-blooded act, father."

"He has just killed poor Vale."

"Mr. Shields says that he did not kill him."

"Bosh! nonsense! are you stupid enough to take his word against all facts?"

"I am, father."

"Why, he made a threat to me this morning that he would kill Vale; but I did not know how soon he would carry it out."

"Father, Mr. Shields made no such threat, as you know; he merely said that I would never marry Louis Vale, and he told the truth."

"Well, he has killed him, and thus prevented your becoming the wife of poor Vale, who was one of the noblest fellows that ever lived."

"It is wrong, father, to speak unkindly of the dead; but Louis Vale was a profligate, a gambler, and one whose private life was kept hidden from those whose respect he sought."

"I intended him for your husband, Helen, and he is dead; dead by the hand of a man whom I will see does not escape the gallows for his dastard crime," and with this Mr. Hayward returned down-town to take steps to have Frank Shields prosecuted to the full extent of the law, while Helen murmured:

"No, he shall not die, for in my heart I believe him to be innocent."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS SAILOR.

A VESSEL coming into port reported having been overhauled upon the high seas and robbed by a lateen-rigged craft, flying the black flag, and having in company with her a brig which answered the description of the vessel that had so mysteriously disappeared from the harbor under cover of the darkness.

The barque, which had been sent in search of the pirate, also ran into the harbor and dropped anchor, to report a want of success, for nowhere could she and the daring outlaw vessel, though she had spoken several who had seen her and with a brig in her company.

Hardly had the barque returned when several bodies of seamen, bearing wounds to mark how they had died, were washed ashore, and these were recognized as the mate, bo'sen and seamen who had been left on board the ill-fated brig.

Of course this told the story that the West Indian pirate had boldly entered the harbor and cut out the brig which had eluded him the day before.

Who that pirate was Mr. Hayward made known by telling of the kidnapping of his daughter, which circumstance he had kept from the public up to that time, having related it only to a few intimates, and at the same time keeping back the truth as to who had been her rescuer.

Known to all in town, as it were, the secret came out in earnest that Rupert Mortimer had turned pirate, and was, in fact, none other than a famous sea-rover, who had not hesitated to strike a blow at his own people and boyhood's home.

A preliminary examination having been held of the murder of Louis Vale, his alleged slayer was remanded to jail to await trial in court, and not one atom of sympathy followed him into his dismal retreat, while the dead student was followed to his grave by a vast concourse of people who bewailed his untimely end.

At the examination the old seaman had been closely questioned in regard to the affair, and had told his story of how he had met Frank Shields and had been paid by him to go and ask Louis Vale to come to the Point of Rocks.

He had led him to the spot and then

turned away, when he heard angry voices and the words:

"Great God! man, do you intend to kill me?"

A shot followed, the old seaman said, and he turned back in time to see Louis Vale fall and Frank Shields throw his pistol away.

Such was his testimony, and the two hunters reported having heard the same cry in the voice of Louis Vale, and heard his dying words that Frank Shields had killed him.

More testimony was not needed, and no one who heard doubted that Frank Shields was guilty of a vile murder.

As to the old seaman, he was told that he must be on hand as a witness for the trial, and would have to remain in jail until that event unless he could give bail to appear, for he was unknown in the town.

"I can get a shipmate to vouch for me," said the old sailor.

"Who is this shipmate?" asked the coroner.

"We call him Captain Tom."

"Ah, yes; of the Messmates' Anchorage?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will send for him and see," was the answer, and Captain Tom soon after appeared.

"Do you know this man?" asked the coroner.

"I do."

"He is witness in this murder case, and it is necessary that he be on hand at the trial."

"I do not wish to commit him, but as he was a stranger I must do so unless he can give bail to appear."

"You'll go surety for me, Captain Tom, won't you?" said the old sailor, somewhat anxiously.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Coroner, for I have known Sailor Sam for a number of years, and 'll go bail for him if you think I'm good."

"Oh, you'll do, Captain Tom, so, my man, you can go."

The two men left the coroner's office together and were soon after seated in Captain Tom's private room at his inn.

"Well, captain, how did you get mixed up in all this?" asked Captain Tom, quietly.

"I mixed myself up in it on purpose, Tom, and matters turned out better than I hoped," was the answer in a very different voice from that in which the old sailor had spoken when addressing strangers.

"You are up to some game, Captain Morte."

"Yes; and I'll win it."

"I hope so, for your sake; but I was on needles to-day for fear your disguise would be penetrated, for I saw faults in it, if closely observed, for that beard don't fit you as it should, and I'll try and improve on it before you go out upon the street again; but you did not tell me about this affair."

"Oh, I wanted my two rivals for the hand of Helen Hayward out of the way, so made one shoot the other, you know, and the other gets hanged for the murder."

"With them out of my path, Helen will be won back to her old way of thinking and will be willing to run off with me."

"If she does not prove willing?"

"Then she must go anyhow for I have sworn to make her my wife."

"But you dare not appear at this trial, for when you are brought before the gaze of so many eyes some one will penetrate your disguise."

"True; and we must concoct some plan between us to get me out of it."

"I pledged my word for your reappearance in a thousand dollars' bail."

"I'll pay the money to you and let it be forfeited."

"It is better that way than have you recognized; but— Ah! I have it."

"Well?"

"You remember that I told you when I rigged you up in your disguise that you were the image of an old seaman, Sailor Sam, who visits me once every year or so?"

"Yes."

"Well, Sailor Sam came into port this morning, and landed from a coasting schooner very sick."

"I put him to bed and doctored him; but I feel confident that he will make a die of it."

"What then?"

"If he should not, I'll post him as a witness, and he can appear at the trial to represent you."

"But will they not discover the difference?"

"No, indeed; for I can hardly tell you apart myself, only that he is real and you are made up."

"And will he act for me?"

"Oh, yes; for he will do as I say."

"But suppose he should die?"

"I have an idea in that case too."

"What is it?"

"I shall simply send for the coroner, play him off for you, and in that case when Death steps in a court cannot claim a forfeit."

"Tom, you are a born schemer, and I leave all in your hands," was the enthusiastic reply of the pirate captain, for such he was as the reader now knows.

Then, after a moment, he added:

"Well, as I am supposed to be ill, you must fix me up some other disguise, Tom, for I must be able to go about free from discovery."

"I can arrange it for you, captain," was Captain Tom's response, and the two sat down to dinner and ate with the appetite of men whose consciences were blunted by long familiarity with crime.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE CLAWS OF A SEA TIGER.

SEVERAL weeks dragged their length along, and in that time changes had come to those who have thus far figured in my story.

Louis Vale had been laid in his grave over in the churchyard, and Frank Shields, the most promising and popular student of the University, had been proven guilty of murder, and sentenced to die upon the gallows.

He had told his story, as it was, at the trial, but no one had believed him, and the two hunters had related all that they had seen and heard, while the testimony of Sailor Sam was read, for the old seaman had suddenly taken sick and died, it was said by his bondsman, Captain Tom.

The result was of course the finding of Frank Shields guilty, and his sentence to death on the gallows.

He had received his sentence without a quiver, and with a fearless face that won the admiration of all, and had then gone back to his cell a doomed man, with every hope in life cut out of his heart, and the thought of soon going down into an ignominious grave alone before him.

After the sentence of Frank Shields, to the surprise of many who knew her, Helen Hayward became quite gay again, and joined a party who were to run down the coast to Boston on a short stay.

A pleasure craft had been selected for the voyage, and, as she was a fleet-sailing schooner, so small that she could run into any of the havens along the coast, there was no dread felt of the free rovers often seen along shore.

It was a gay party, some twenty in number, and Mr. Hayward and Helen were among them.

The pleasure schooner set sail early one pleasant afternoon, and all on board seemed in high spirits, while jokes were made about being captured by pirates, and one or two romantic young girls of the party even hoped that they would be chased by a buccaner.

Toward sunset a sail suddenly hove in sight inshore, and at a glance Mr. Hayward pronounced it to be an American brig-of-war.

In this assertion he was seconded by the captain of the schooner, and no effort was made to give the stranger a wide berth.

As they drew nearer the cruiser fired a shot across the bows of the schooner, and set the Stars and Stripes.

"I told you so! it is the Boxer," cried Mr. Hayward, and all eyes were turned upon the beautiful vessel.

"She is strangely like your brig, Mr. Hayward, that the West Indian pirate captured from you," said the captain of the schooner.

"She is, indeed, only her spars are larger, her topmasts higher, and her rigging generally appears more trim than that on the Boxer," was the answer.

"You have never heard a word of her since she was reported as being the pirate's prize?"

"Not a word, captain! but see, there comes a shot across our bows, so he really means for us to come to."

"Yes, sir, he sees our rakish look and wishes to have a closer view of us, and it is

but natural that he should be suspicious with the rumors of pirates along the coast," and the captain gave orders to lay the schooner to, while the cruiser came dashing swiftly toward her, and all eyes were turned in admiration upon her beautiful proportions, her rakish rig, and her speed.

A short half-hour, and the cruiser luffed up sharp, and instead of running astern and laying to, as all had expected, she was skillfully laid alongside the schooner, upon whose decks sprung a tall form in uniform.

One glance into his face, and Helen Hayward gave a shriek, which was echoed by others.

"Oh, God! it is not an American cruiser, for that man is the Sea Desperado," came in piercing tones from the pallid lips of Helen Hayward.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIRATE'S DEMAND.

So astounding was the surprise of all on board the pleasure schooner, at the sudden laying alongside of the vessel they had believed to be a cruiser, and the appearance of Rupert Mortimer, as many there knew him to be, that, from the captain down, they stood in dumb amazement.

The schooner's crew numbered but half a score, and there were as many male passengers on board; but what could these do against the brig, armed most thoroughly, and with her decks crowded with men?

Resistance would be madness, and so in dumb horror all stood, while Captain Morte, with a smile upon his handsome but sinister face, advanced toward the frightened passengers.

His guns were run out, his crew at quarters, and a band of red-capped boarders stood ready to follow him upon the schooner should he give the word, so he held the prize at his mercy.

Raising his cap politely as he advanced, he said pleasantly:

"Miss Hayward, I greet you, and I assure you this is an unexpected pleasure. Ah! I see many faces here that I remember, and if I mistake not, one who sat on the jury that decided that I should die on the gallows. That was some years ago, Pierce Sanford, and you see that I am not yet dead, while you will find that I outlive you."

The man to whom he spoke, and one who had indeed been one of the jurymen upon his trial for murder, turned deadly pale at this; but unheeding him more, Captain Morte again turned to Helen, who was now calm, though as white as a corpse:

"Have you no greeting for an old friend, Miss Hayward?" he asked, in a low, earnest tone.

"I acknowledge no friendship with pirates, sir," was the haughty reply.

"Take care, my proud beauty, and do not anger me, for upon you depends the safety of all on board," was the reply of the sea rover.

"Upon me? Pray explain, Sir Outlaw."

"You were once my promised bride, fair Helen."

"That was years ago, when I was hardly in my teens, and when I believed you to be an honorable man, Rupert Mortimer."

"Here, sir, how dare you thus alarm and worry my child," cried Mr. Hayward, indignantly, advancing toward the pirate.

Captain Morte laughed lightly, and said:

"Mr. Hayward, I will have no interference from you, sir. You forbade me your house once, and I have my revenge, for that brig is your vessel, which I cut out of her harbor, and I have metamorphosed her into a buccaner craft. Now I have this schooner as my prize, and all on board as my captives, and it depends upon your daughter to say what will be the fate of all."

"Upon my daughter?" gasped the merchant. "In God's name how?"

"This craft is valuable; there is a pleasant party on board—all with considerable funds to spend in Boston, whither you are going, and many wear rich jewels. Altogether this will be a rich haul for me; but then I do not care to rob my prisoners or to slay them, if I can make terms with Miss Hayward."

"Gladly will I make any terms with you that lie within my power, if I can save those on board this vessel," cried Helen, earnestly.

"You can do so, Miss Hayward."

"Hold, Helen! Do not bind yourself by any pledge to this sea monster," commanded Mr. Hayward.

"Silence, sir! for you, who would have torn your daughter from the man she loved, because he was a poor student, and married her to a worthless villain, believing him to be rich, have no right now to speak," and Captain Morte's manner was stern and earnest, and Mr. Hayward lowered his eyes before the piercing gaze, for his heart smote him with the thought that the pirate told the truth.

"What am I to do, sir, to save my friends?" asked Helen, anxious to end the suspense that was upon all.

He looked her straight in the face as he replied:

"Fulfill your pledge made to me in your girlhood."

"What! become your wife?" she cried, in horror and amazement.

"Yes, Miss Hayward, I demand that you become my wife," was the cool reply of the pirate chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

HELEN'S SACRIFICE.

THE low moan of Helen Hayward, at the demand of the pirate, was echoed by every one of those who now stood about her upon the deck of the schooner.

There were those there that knew of her romantic love affair for Rupert Mortimer when she was but a child, and felt that it had hurt her to have him turn out as he had.

But now, after time had healed the wound, and another love had crept into her heart, to become also a shattered idol, it was pitiful indeed to have her persecuted by this coming back of her old lover, and coming back with the brand of pirate upon his brow, and the demand that she should become a pirate's bride.

But could Rupert Mortimer, wicked as he had proven himself, really mean this implied threat? was in every mind.

He stood before them in his rakish uniform, handsome, but stern and sneering, and his eyes were fixed upon the beautiful girl who quivered like an aspen leaf.

"Man, can you mean the words you have just uttered?" cried Mr. Hayward, while every atom of color fled from his face.

"I do."

"That you expect this poor girl to become your wife?"

"Yes."

"No! no! no! you cannot mean it, Rupert Mortimer," groaned Helen, clasping her hands together, and appearing the very picture of grief.

"Helen, I loved you when you was a child of twelve, and the years that have passed have only served to deepen that love."

"My wild life made me a wanderer, an outlaw, but it has not made me willing to give you up, and I will not do so."

"You are all-powerful here, surrounded as you are by your crew, your companions in crime, while our vessel, all of us, are at your mercy."

"Do you consider this the act of a brave man, pirate though you be, to force me to become what would cause me to loathe myself?"

"Helen, I wish you to become my wife, made so by honorable means, though I force you into the bands."

"Will you do as I say?"

"If I refuse?"

"Then may Heaven have mercy upon your friends."

"And I?"

"Will be forced to become my wife."

"And the fate in store for those here about me?"

"Well, yonder man, Pierce Sanford, will be the first to go, for I shall hang him to the yard-arm of my brig, for I have not forgotten that I owe him a trifling revenge," and the hard manner came back to Captain Morte once more, for he had softened somewhat while urging his demand upon Helen.

"And then?" and Helen spoke in perfect self-control.

"I will rob all on board of their gold and their jewels, burn this schooner and set them

adrift in the boats in the face of this rising storm."

All shuddered at this threat of the pirate, while Helen asked quickly:

"Will I go in the boats?"

"No, you will go on the brig."

Her head sunk and she remained silent, while Mr. Hayward said:

"Sir Pirate, if you will place your valuation upon this vessel, and what riches we all have with us, I will write you a draft upon my Boston partner for the full amount."

"It is your daughter, Horace Hayward, not your gold I want," was the reply.

"Oh, no, your trade is that of a sea-robber and cut-throat."

"Well, I'll prove that I do not wish to rob you of your riches, or any of you, if Helen will consent to become my wife."

"You will release all?" asked the maiden, quickly.

"All but one."

"And that one?"

"Pierce Sanford."

"If I consent to become your wife?"

"Yes."

"You will not touch the gold or valuables of any one if I consent?"

"I will not."

"Or the vessel?"

"She shall go free with all on board."

"And Mr. Sanford?" asked Helen, in the same tone of forced calmness, as she turned and glanced at that gentleman, who stood leaning against the bulwark, his daughter, a lovely girl of seventeen, clinging to his arm and trembling with fear.

"He must remain."

"For what purpose?"

"It is my intention to swing him up to the yard-arm."

"No, no, you will not do that," cried Edith Sanford, pleadingly.

But the pirate did not answer, and after a moment Helen said:

"Rupert Mortimer, you have said that you loved me."

"I do, Helen."

"I will test that love."

"Do so."

"You wish me to become your wife?"

"Yes, I beg it, and if you refuse, I demand it."

Helen was now white-faced, stern, and so perfectly calm that it was painful to look at her, and know the effort she was making for self-control.

In a voice that was firm and clear, she said:

"Well, sir, I agree to become your wife, but upon conditions."

The man started, his face flushed with pleasure, and he made a step toward her, while a moan broke from the lips of all else who heard the words of the brave girl.

"What are your conditions, Helen?" he eagerly asked.

"First, that you release this vessel and all on board."

"All?"

"Yes, and their property must remain untouched."

"All but one, Helen."

"No, I include Mr. Sanford too."

"I will not include him."

"Then do your worst, for I will not agree to other terms," she said, coldly.

The pirate frowned, and after an instant said:

"Well, I grant your terms."

"Those are not all."

"What else do you demand?"

"I pledge myself to become your wife, whenever you make the demand, after one month has passed."

"You will not sail with me to a minister now—"

"I will do nothing of the kind: but you know me, Rupert Mortimer, and that I will keep a pledge I make you, and that pledge is to become your wife after one month has passed, and you have then but to come, or send for me, and I will do as you command."

"And I have only your pledge, Helen?"

"Only my pledge."

"And must release you and all with you?"

"Yes."

"I cannot do it."

"Then do your worst, Rupert Mortimer, for I agree to no other terms."

He remained in silent thought, while all gathered about Helen and began to plead to her not to offer herself as a sacrifice.

"It is my duty," she murmured.

Her father seemed utterly crushed and could not speak, but looked imploringly at his daughter.

At last the pirate, upon whom all eyes now turned, said slowly:

"Helen, for your sake, and to prove that I do love you and trust you, I accept your terms."

"And this vessel and all on board shall go free?"

"Yes."

"Then I give you my pledge that I will accept the sacrifice and become your wife, Sea Desperado though you are, if you allow this yacht and all on board to go free," said Helen, in a voice that did not quiver.

"I accept your pledge, and after one month has passed you shall hear from me."

"Farewell!"

He raised his cap, and bowing low, turned quickly and sprung back to his own deck, when his commanding voice rung out in orders to cast the brig loose from the schooner.

As the two vessels swung apart Helen Hayward sunk down upon the deck in a swoon that looked strangely akin to death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HELEN'S DOUBLE MISSION.

THE schooner went on her way, after being released by the pirate vessel and rode out the storm that broke with nightfall to find an anchorage in Boston harbor the following day.

It was long before Helen recovered from the deep swoon into which she had fallen; but at last she awoke to consciousness and at once rallied, with the air of one who felt that she had a task to perform and must not yield to weakness.

Over her had bent her father and her friends in sorrow and sympathy; but she refused to speak of her pledge when she became herself again, and at once assumed a cheerfulness which she was far from feeling.

Going to a hotel with her father, Helen stated that she would go out to call upon a friend, and refusing the proffered escort of her father she started alone.

She soon came to a house which seemed to be the one she sought, as it was the same number and street which was written on a piece of paper she held in her hand, and ascending the steps she raised the heavy brass knocker and let it fall several times.

A sad-faced woman answered the summons, and to the query of Helen:

"Is Mr. Walter at home?"

She answered:

"Yes, miss, but he is asleep, as he is a night-watchman, and sleeps all the morning."

"It is important that I see him."

"I will call him," said the woman, and ushering Helen into a little parlor she disappeared.

In a short while a man entered the room and bowed to his fair visitor.

He was a man of forty, apparently in the middle walks of life, and with a face that seemed to have been schooled to hide all emotion.

"I am William Walter, miss, and I believe you desired to see me," he said.

"Yes, I have come to see you upon a matter of importance, and of advantage to you. I wish you to do a service for an unfortunate man, and for which you will be paid well."

"What is it that I am to do, lady?" and William Walter strove hard to recall where he had seen his fair visitor before and under what circumstances.

"You are a night-watchman now, I believe?"

"I am, miss."

"May I ask what you are paid for your services?"

"It is a strange question, lady."

"I ask it, to be governed in it by a price I intend to offer you."

"I receive seven hundred dollars a year, miss."

"Would you like to make that sum by one week's work?"

"Would I indeed, lady?"

"Could you get some one to take your place for that time?"

"My brother-in-law relieves me at times, lady, when I am sick."

"Then I will give you the money to pay him for the time he takes your place."

"But what am I to do, miss?"

"You were once the jailer of a seaport town upon this coast?"

The man's face flushed, but he answered:

"I was, miss."

"You were discharged on account of being suspected of accepting a bribe to let Rupert Mortimer escape?"

"Yes, miss."

"You were guilty, I believe?"

"So they had it, miss."

"You know the jail and its grounds well?"

"As I do my own face, lady."

"There is a prisoner in that jail now that I wish you to release."

"Ah! I see the work you expect of me now."

"Yes, I came here especially to find you and ask you to do the work."

"I have tried hard to accomplish the thing by getting aid without coming to you, but I could not, and I now offer you all expenses and a year's salary, if you release the prisoner."

"Who is he, lady?"

"A student, Frank Shields by name, and who I am confident is guiltless of the crime charged against him, notwithstanding the circumstantial evidence brought forward to convict him."

"I know him, lady, for he came to the University before I left the town, and I always liked him."

"I also recognize you now, Miss Hayward, and remember how you came to the jail one night, disguised as an old woman, and pleaded so to see Rupert Mortimer, that I allowed you to do so."

"And you will undertake the work, Mr. Walter?" asked Helen, who seemed not to like the recollection of the past.

"Yes; I will see what I can do, miss, though it is a difficult task to accomplish."

"You know the jail so well, sir."

"Yes; and I have changed considerable since I left the town, for I have let my beard grow full, while I have become bald, so it will be hard for the people there to recall me when I make a few other changes in my appearance."

"Then I may depend upon you?"

"Yes."

"And you will start at once?"

"When is the day appointed for the execution?"

"On Friday two weeks."

"Then I must begin work at once; but do you know what cell your friend occupies?"

"Yes; it is number thirteen, in the left wing."

"Ah! yes; they call it the Death Cell, for there doomed prisoners are put, and they have the facilities there of chaining desperate prisoners to the floor."

"It is an unlucky number, Miss Hayward, but we will not be discouraged by that."

"Then, Mr. Walter, I leave all in your hands, and here is half the sum I promised you, and spare no expense or money for bribes, if needed, for I will gladly pay it."

"I will do my best, Miss Hayward, and I thank you."

"I accepted a bribe once before because I sadly needed money, and I did say that I would live square the rest of my life; but you tempt me and I fall; and besides, I would like to serve you, and that poor young student, too."

"Thank you and may Heaven grant you success."

"If you wish to communicate with me call at my home, for we start back to-morrow night, and ask for Lucy, my maid, saying that you are a friend of hers, and I will have all arranged with her."

"Now, good-by; and I shall look for your success," and Helen departed from the home of the ex-jailer.

On her way back to the hotel she drew her veil closely about her face and turned into a side street that led into a part of the city by no means fashionable.

Glancing about as she walked along, she caught sight of a sign upon the other side which was suggestive of a money-lender's office, for three gilt balls hung above the door.

"LEVI COHEN,

"Lends Money on All Personal Property,"

was the sign that swung above the gilt balls, and entering the dingy place Helen asked to see Mr. Cohen.

"I ish t'e gentlemens, mish," said a hard-faced Jew behind the counter, feeling that his visitor was above the average of his customers.

"I wish you would lend me some money upon these jewels," said Helen, coming to business at once, and displaying a velvet case containing some rare old jewelry.

The Jew was delighted, and said eagerly: "Dey ish very bootiful, mish; but how mooch does yer vants for dem?"

"I wish three thousand dollars, sir."

"Oh, no, mish; I vill gives you two t'ousants."

"I know the value of the jewels, sir, and that they are worth more than double the sum I ask," said Helen, coldly.

"I vill give you twenty-five hundreds, mish."

"I will go elsewhere then, sir, for I am no poor person, pawning jewels to buy bread and clothing."

"I need the money for a special purpose, and may not use one-third of it; but I wish to have more on hand if needed," and Helen was about to take the case, when the Jew said:

"Vell, mish, I vill treat you just so ash you vas my sishter, unt gives you t'e t'ree t'ousants, if I never gets back one toller of monish."

Helen smiled in spite of herself, and handed the Jew a paper containing an inventory of the jewels, which she asked him to sign.

He saw that he was dealing with no ordinary person, read over the list and compared it with the jewelry, and put his signature to it.

Then he counted out the money, and with a glad look upon her face, called there momentarily by feeling that she had the money to accomplish her purpose, she hastened back to the hotel, and surprised all by her lively humor; but, burning in her heart and brain was the pledge she had made to Captain Morte, the pirate, and the mission she had set herself to accomplish in rescuing Frank Shields from the gallows.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OFFICER AND HIS PRISONER.

THE little pleasure schooner returned to her port, with a very different feeling among her passengers than they had started with, for the pledge given by Helen to the pirate captain cast a gloom over all, and the party separated to go to their homes with saddened hearts at the sacrifice the beautiful girl had made for them.

Mr. Hayward, as soon as he arrived in Boston, had sought the naval head-quarters and made known that Captain Morte, the West Indian pirate, was off the coast, cruising in a brig which he had boldly cut out at her anchorage, and had forced from his daughter a pledge to become his wife within a given time.

Instantly all the vessels-of-war along the upper coast were communicated with and ordered to hunt down the pirate, and merchants equipped and sent out on several vessels, hastily armed, volunteer crews for the work of running the daring rover to death.

With the hope that he would be taken before the month rolled by both Miss Hayward and her parents had consolation; but should such not be the case, the result must be fearful to poor Helen, who, against all urging, said that she would keep her word to Captain Morte.

With the different happenings of late in and about it, the little town was kept in a fever of excitement, and many persons really feared that the daring pirate would boldly run in past the almost useless little fort and fire on the place, and by night there were many who kept bright watch not knowing what might turn up before the light of day should dawn again.

In the face of her pledge, and the fact that her acknowledged lover was lying in his cell under sentence of death, folks wondered that Helen could keep up her spirits and appear at all times as cheerful as before such gloomy happenings.

Some wondered if she ever thought of the

poor student in irons and in hopelessness, counting the days he had to live, and many gave her credit for being utterly heartless, while a few even said that she really did not seem disinclined to becoming a pirate's bride.

Thus wagged the world in the little town, several days after the return of the pleasure-party to Boston, when a small fishing-smack arrived in port one evening about dark, containing two persons besides the crew.

One of these two was a large man, dressed as a naval officer, and the other was an evil-faced, heavily-bearded fellow who was ironed hand and foot, besides being gagged.

Calling for a carriage the officer dismissed the crew of the smack, who had brought him, he said, from a port above on the coast, and entering the vehicle with his prisoner he said shortly:

"To the jail, driver."

A few moments after the carriage rolled into the jail-yard, and the jailer appeared to greet his visitors, whoever they might be.

"I am Lieutenant Williams, sir, of the navy, and I have here a most desperate prisoner whom I wish to claim a cell for until the morrow, when I take the packet for Boston," said the officer.

"Certainly, sir, I can give you a cell for your man; but what is his crime?"

"Murder most desperate, of an officer and seaman, and he is so violent I shall have to ask you to give me a cell with another occupant, who can watch him, for fear he may harm himself, and also where he can be chained to the floor."

"He does look desperate indeed, sir, and I will put him in Number Thirteen, which is the Death Cell, and where we have a poor young fellow who never seems to sleep at night, and he can keep an eye upon him."

"Thank you, sir," and the officer followed the jailer with his prisoner to cell Number Thirteen.

The huge iron door was flung open and the prisoner was taken in and chained to the floor, when the gag was removed from his mouth.

Seated in one corner of the cell, in which burned a dim taper, was Frank Shields.

He was chained by one foot to the floor, and sat in gloomy silence, hardly noticing the interruption.

His face was pale and haggard; but his eyes were bright and fearless, and he showed no nervousness at his coming fate.

"Mr. Shields, I have had to put a prisoner in here with you, sir; but it is only for to-night, for he leaves to-morrow upon the Boston packet," said the jailer, who had learned to respect the doomed student during the time he had had him under his charge.

"As you please, sir; I have nothing to say," answered Frank Shields, quietly.

Having chained his prisoner to a ring in the stone floor, the officer departed with the jailer, who upon his invitation accompanied him to an inn near by for supper, it being a change from prison fare that he coveted.

After washing down a hearty meal with several bottles of wine, the two went to the office of the Boston packets and engaged a state-room on board the vessel that sailed at noon on the following day.

"If you can oblige me with a room, I will sleep in the jail to-night, for I wish to be on hand if that desperate fellow cuts up any of his antics, as he has a habit of doing," said the officer, as the two walked back toward the prison.

"We are not prepared for guests, sir; but I have a room that my assistant jailer, who is absent for a few days, occupies, and you are welcome to stay there," answered the jailer.

This offer was accepted by the naval officer, and the two returned to the jail, and, after a glance in at his prisoner, the lieutenant expressed a desire to retire.

They kept early hours in the jail, and with its strong walls and locks, no guard was on duty at night, so that before midnight all was as silent as the grave in the dismal abode, the silence only now and then broken by some conscience-haunted prisoner crying out in his sleep, or the sonorous snore of some individual wholly indifferent to his surroundings and the causes that had placed him there.

Shortly after midnight a form glided noiselessly down one of the dimly-lighted corridors.

Reaching the central hallway, off which

were the rooms of the jailer and his family, he paused and stood for some moments in an attitude of listening.

As though convinced that no other than himself was stirring, he crossed the hall and turned into another corridor, which he walked along with noiseless step.

Halting in front of an iron door at the further end, he took from his pocket a key and placed it in the lock, which yielded to the turn of his wrist, and he stepped within the cell.

Suddenly a glare of light flashed out from a dark lantern which he had taken from beneath his coat, and it revealed the forms of the two occupants.

They both stood erect, as though expecting the visitor, and one of them wore no irons.

It was the prisoner whom the naval officer had brought there.

The other was Frank Shields, and he was still in irons, while his face was flushed with excitement as he turned it upon the officer who had entered the cell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MIDNIGHT RESCUE.

"You do not remember me, I see, Mr. Shields?" said the officer, as he caught the eye of the student fixed upon him.

"I do, sir; for I never forget a face, no matter how much changed.

"You were once the jailer here," answered Frank.

"I was; but, 'sh! don't speak aloud, for it may spoil all, and I have come here to save you."

"So your companion told me."

"And why are you not free of your irons, for I expected Ned here to have you all ready by the time I came?"

"First, sir, I wish to know why you serve me?"

"For the sake of the one who sent me here."

"And that one?"

"I think you should know, sir, who holds your good most at heart," was the significant response of William Walter.

"Ah! I now know, but your companion could give me no clew," said Frank, quickly.

"In serving you, sir, I am serving your friend, and I beg you to at once let me free you, for all is open to us now, as I have the keys to unlock your manacles and the doors of the jail, while here is a disguise that you can throw over you," and the officer took from beneath his cloak a naval cap and a false beard, with a small short cloak such as was then worn by the officers of the navy.

"I have been sentenced to death, sir, and, though I am innocent, I hold no hope in life, and may as well remain here to meet my cruel fate," said Frank Shields, sadly.

"Mr. Shields, myself and friend here have run a fearful risk in coming here to rescue you, and the one for whom we act has spared no money to set you free, and I cannot believe that you will remain here to die on the gallows, when you can, by being out of this place, perhaps prove that you are indeed innocent of the crime you are charged with.

"See, here is a letter to you from your friend, and by reading it you may be the better convinced that no silly sentiment or hopeless despair should allow you to remain here to be hanged like a dog when life lies before you."

"You argue well, sir," and Frank grasped the letter and broke the seal.

His face flushed as a roll of bank-notes were displayed to his gaze, while his eyes became dim as he read:

"MY DEAR FRANK:—Believing you, when you said that you are innocent, I now do all in my power to save you, where, if I thought you guilty, I would allow the law to take its course without a regret.

"This will be handed to you by one whom I believe will be able to rescue you, and you may trust him to find for you a place of safety until you can seek a home elsewhere.

"Knowing your purse is not a long one, I send within a few hundred dollars, to give you a start in life, and, as you requested, I have taken charge of your effects at your quarters in the University, and they are subject to your demand.

"When you are able to prove yourself innocent it will be a happy day for me, the only happiness I ever expect to know again in this world.

"God bless you, Frank, and, no matter what may happen to me through life, never doubt the love of"

"HELEN HAYWARD."

Frank's hand trembled as he folded the letter and thrust it with the bills into his pocket.

Holding out his hands toward his rescuer, he said, calmly:

"Unlock my manacles, sir, for I am ready to go with you."

"Well said, sir, and I am glad to carry you out of this dismal hole.

"I saw your friend several days ago and made known the plot I had formed to bring my comrade here in as a prisoner, and we took a smack on the coast above and arrived just at dark, and thus far affairs work well.

"Now, sir, you are free of your irons, and the next thing will be to leave this jail behind us."

"And from here?"

"We will take a smack which I have ready, sir, to sail at any moment, and run along the coast to New York, when you can go your way, and I will return with my friend here to my home in Boston."

"I am ready, sir," said Frank Shields, and the three left the cell together.

Noiselessly they passed along the corridor, crossed the hall and out of the jail into the yard, and thence through the massive gate into the street, the pretended naval officer having a key for each lock.

"You managed to get the jailer's keys, I see; but you will not take them with you?" said Frank.

"No, they are mine, for I had the keys duplicated when I was jailer here, and I notice the locks have not been changed," was the answer.

Through the deserted streets they wended their way down to the harbor shore, and there lay a trim little craft riding at anchor only a few fathoms away.

A hail from Walter brought a man ashore in a boat, the sail was raised, and away sped the little craft seaward with the young student who had been so boldly rescued from beneath the very shadow of the gallows.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REBEL PIRATE.

I WILL now return to the disguised vessel of Captain Morte, and her prize, the brig, after the departure of the pirate chief to the town.

The buccaneer lieutenant, Duval, headed the two vessels for the rendezvous upon the coast, where Captain Morte had told him he would join him.

On the way thither he managed to overhaul and board a prize or two, but found them of little value, and arrived with the two vessels in safety to the inlet.

Arrangements were at once begun for the transfer of the armament on board the lateen-rigged vessel to the brig, and by night the work was accomplished, and the new vessel, to be transformed into a pirate cruiser, presented a most warlike appearance.

Worn out with his day's work, Duval left the deck in charge of Riaz, the Spanish lieutenant, and only awoke when the sun was streaming into the cabin the following morning through the stern-ports.

Not a sound reached his ears from the deck, and dressing hastily he was about to leave the cabin to see what the deathlike silence meant, when his eyes fell upon a note addressed to him and lying upon the table.

Quickly he seized the note, and in dumb amazement read the following:

"ON BOARD PIRATE BRIG. }
"MIDNIGHT."

"LIEUTENANT DUVAL, COMMANDING:—

"SENOR:—I have just successfully carried out a plan that has long been in my mind, and which a fortunate circumstance has enabled me to do.

"My plan was to seize the lugger and become her commander, for I am not one to serve as an inferior on a deck where I should be chief.

"Your captain has been kind to me, and so have you; hence I do not take your brig, all armed as she is, but the lugger, all unarmed as she is, intending soon to place guns upon her deck, and add to her crew, when I will flaunt my own flag to the breeze.

"Three-fourths of your crew were secretly won over to me; but those whom I dared not trust you will find in irons in the hold.

"As for yourself, knowing that you would resist against all odds, I drugged your wine last night, and feel that when you get over its effects I will be far at sea with my prize.

"Captain Morte intended giving up the lugger, so he will not lose much, and I trust that he will not begrudge her to me.

"There is room enough upon the seas for all sea rovers that dare to fly their flags, and I hope, if Captain Morte should cross my path, that he will not be antagonistic toward me, for I shall defend myself and my crew which I have obtained to-night.

"Wishing you all, in your new cruiser, every success, and a peaceful end, I am, senor,
"Your brother rover, RIAZ."

Hastening upon deck, as soon as he had read this remarkable epistle, Duval saw not a seaman in sight, but descending into the steerage found them there in irons.

There were something over a score of them, Americans, English and negroes who had not been trusted by the rebel pirate, and they were hastily freed by the officer, and ordered on deck, when the letter of Riaz, the rebel, was read to them.

Thus crippled by the loss of three-fourths of his crew, the pirate lieutenant felt it his duty to be most wary, and a watch was set on a high cliff ashore to report any incoming vessel.

Anxious to regain his prestige with his commander, though he felt that it had not been his fault that Riaz had run off with the lugger, for he had not looked for a foe among the crew, he took a small boat and rowed to the fishing-hamlet which he knew to be further up the river, and which rumor had it was the haunt of smugglers.

He found a bold, hardy set of men, who eyed him sharply upon his approach, and upon asking to see their leader a man advanced who quietly asked how he could serve the stranger.

"I am from the vessel anchored in what is known as Smuggler's Inlet," answered Duval.

"I know that, sir," was the reply.

"I need men to serve on my vessel, and have come here to seek them."

"You had a large crew on board when you came to anchor night before last," said the fisherman, to the surprise of Duval, who had not believed his presence on the coast known.

"True, and I had two vessels," he answered.

"And now, sir?"

"I have but one, the brig."

"May I ask what has become of the other?"

"A lieutenant mutinied with three-fourths of the crew, drugged me, put my faithful men in irons, and then ran off with the lugger."

"Ah! this has left you in a bad plight indeed," said the leader of the fishermen, who seemed to be a man above those about him in intellect.

"Somewhat; but I have a fleet vessel, and a few gallant seamen to man her."

"Your vessel is a cruiser?"

"Yes."

"Under what flag?"

"A flag that will enrich those who serve under it, though they gain their riches by hard knocks," was the bold reply.

The fisherman looked Duval squarely in the eyes for an instant, and then said bluntly:

"I like your candor, sir, and you have been honest with me, for I have spies on the wooded point of land above you, who have reported all that has transpired on board your vessel.

"Knowing how weak you were in men, I had formed the idea of seizing your vessel to-night with my lads, and turning her into a free rover, for smuggling here is about ended, so closely are we watched.

"As you have come boldly to us, and I like your looks, I will frankly tell you that I will ship with three-score gallant fellows of my band, and only ask fair play and a man who is no coward to command us."

Duval was charmed at this speech of the smuggler, and answered quickly:

"I assure you I am delighted to hear you speak thus, and I will not only promise you all fair play, but you, sir, will be next to myself in rank, I being the senior lieutenant, in command now while my captain is absent."

"Ah! you are not then the chief?"

"I am not, sir, for my commander is Captain Morte."

"Indeed! I have heard of him as a successful rover; but I thank you for the offer you make me and will come on board with my men to-night."

Duval held a still longer conversation with the smuggler, and having informed him that the brig was a remarkably swift vessel, as stanch as a line-of-battle ship, and only needed larger spars and more canvas to make her speed phenomenal, the newly-appointed pirate officer told him that among their stores were spars and sails enough to rig a frigate, and that he would bring with him a liberal supply when he boarded the vessel that night.

Delighted at his success, Duval returned to the brig, and true to his promise the smuggler leader and his men came on board shortly after nightfall, and when some time after a fishing-smack ran alongside, bringing Captain Morte, he found his vessel rigged out in a new set of sails and spars that would drive her at a terrific pace through the waters.

Hearing his lieutenant's report, he did not censure him, but sanctioned his acts, and then ordered the brig to be gotten under way at once, adding:

"I have just left the town, Duval, and am anxious to catch a pleasure-craft that is now on her way to Boston."

His capture of that pleasure-craft is already known to the reader, as also the cruel pledge he demanded of Helen Hayward to sacrifice herself for others.

Having forced the promise from Helen, Captain Morte set out upon a cruise to while away the month of waiting until he should claim his bride, and it was while sailing along close inshore one morning that a small smack was sighted running along with all her canvas set.

"Fire a shot, Duval, to bring that fellow alongside, for he has doubtless had a good catch of fish and is hastening into the nearest market with them, so we will get a supply," ordered Captain Morte, upon catching sight of the little craft.

A shot was fired across the bows of the smack, but it served not the purpose intended, for it still held on its way, but fell off more, so as to get nearer the land.

"The fellow seems to fear us, so show the United States flag, and throw a shot over him this time, Duval," said the pirate captain.

As the Stars and Stripes fluttered up to the peak of the brig, a solid shot was sent flying over the smack, not very far above the heads of those upon her deck.

But the result was the same, for she did not luff up as expected.

"Curse the fellow, he still holds on, so try him again, for we must not lose our fresh fish, Duval," cried Captain Morte.

Again a shot was fired, and this time it struck near the smack, throwing the spray upon her decks.

Still the bold crew held on as before, seemingly willing to risk the fire of the brig, rather than be brought to.

"The fellow dares us, Duval, so give him a lesson, and fire until you knock the sticks out of him," said Captain Morte, angered at the persistence of the fisherman on the little craft.

The gun was now fired for the third time, and kept firing rapidly, for a while without effect, but suddenly a shot struck the tapering mast, shivering it to splinters, and the clouds of canvas came down upon the deck with a rush.

"By Heaven! it serves him right—Ha! he is launching his yawl to pull for that island, so turn your gun on that boat and knock the fellows out of the water!" cried Captain Morte, in a rage at the determined effort the crew of the smack made to escape him.

A boat was now seen to leave the side of the wrecked and burning smack, as though determined not to be taken by the Sea Desperado. The boat pulled hastily for an island and a league away, while a moment after, a smoke arose from the cabin of the little vessel and flames curled rapidly about the sails as they fluttered above the decks.

"By the beard of Neptune, but the fellow has set his craft on fire: but I will capture him if I have to run the brig ashore to do it," and the tone and look of Captain Morte showed that he was in deadly earnest in his determination to capture the daring crew who thus set him at defiance.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM HOPE TO DESPAIR.

THE little smack in which William Walter, the ex-jailer, and his companions sailed from port the night of Frank Shields's escape from jail, had been chartered for the voyage.

The skipper was a friend of the ex-jailer, and had gone with his little craft to the port to meet him, and once the sail had been spread in flight, she sped along like the very wind.

As the skipper and his single seaman—all

the crew the smack boasted—attended to the sailing of the craft, Frank Shields and his two rescuers sought the rest they so much needed after the excitement they had passed through, and the escaped prisoner lay down with a heart full of thankfulness for his release and of hope for the future.

Helen had certainly proven his friend in need, and his thoughts turned to her with overflowing gratitude for all she had done for him.

He knew that his rescue had cost her a large sum, for William Walter had told him what his payment was to be, and that his expenses, the paying of his comrade and chartering of the smack, amounted to as much more, while she had given to him the sum of five hundred dollars, that he might not go out into the world penniless.

"Over two thousand dollars has she paid to rescue me, and every dollar of it shall she have back, noble girl that she is!" muttered Frank Shields, as he threw himself down in his little bunk to rest.

The morning dawned with the smack well on her way, and a good breeze sending her along at a lively pace.

Having had considerable experience as an amateur sailor, the student took the tiller after breakfast, and with his two rescuers as a crew, gave the skipper and his mate an opportunity to turn in for a few hours.

But short was their rest, for suddenly a sail was sighted coming out of a fog-bank, and that she was armed there could be no doubt.

"We will give her a wide berth, Mr. Walter, for there is no need of being brought to by her, if we can avoid it," said Frank, and he trimmed his sails flat down, and headed closer in toward the shore.

But the stranger had already sighted the smack, and the next moment a flash from her bows showed that she intended to bring them to.

"Better lay to, sir," said the skipper, coming hastily on deck, aroused by the shot.

"I think not, captain, for yonder vessel looks to me strangely like the brig that was cut out of the harbor a short while since by the West Indian pirate, and I would rather risk her shots than have her board us," declared Frank.

"Ah, yes, I heard of that affair, sir, and we had better run for it, rather than take the chances of capture—Ah! there goes her flag to the peak, and she gives us a closer shot at the same time," remarked the skipper.

This shot was also unheeded, and she held on her course, gradually edging nearer the shore.

As the firing increased the skipper became nervous, and urged that they lay to, as he was confident that the brig was an American cruiser.

"And I am confident that she is not," firmly said Frank Shields, and he still held the smack on her course.

"Great God! she will blow us out of the water, and I will lose my craft, if not my life," cried the skipper.

"At what price do you value your smack, Dobson?" asked the ex-jailer.

"She is worth five hundred if she is worth a dollar," was the answer.

"Well, if she is lost I will pay you that sum," responded William Walter, feeling that he must not have Frank Shields recaptured and that Helen Hayward would not hesitate to pay the extra money to save him.

"All right, Walter, and if I get my head knocked off give it to my old woman," the skipper replied, and thus reassured against pecuniary loss, he aided all in his power in the fight.

But another shot from the brig struck the mast a few feet above the deck, splitting and shivering it, and the race had ended, for the sails fell upon them like a cloud.

"Quick! to the boat, and we'll pull for the island," cried Frank Shields, taking command by common consent as the master-spirit.

The boat was hastily lowered from the stern davits and the five men sprung into it, the skipper first setting his smack on fire, with the remark:

"Pirate, or whatever he be, he'll never capture the Lively Lizzie."

But there was but one pair of oars in the boat, the sea was rough, the island nearly a league away, and a determined pursuer was

upon their track, as was shown by a broadside sent flying after them.

"Ha! that is too bad, and, after all, we must surrender," cried Frank Shields, as a shot shivered an oar in the skipper's hand.

There was now nothing left for them to do but to hoist a white handkerchief, in token of surrender, and await the result.

This they did, and soon after the brig ran near and a stern voice ordered the boat alongside.

"You men come on board and cast that tub adrift!" called out Captain Morte, and the next moment the five fugitives advanced toward the quarter-deck.

There stood Captain Morte awaiting them, and as his eyes fell upon Frank Shields, the pirate cried:

"Great God! it is that student who was sentenced to be hanged for murdering Louis Vale! Now I have him in my power!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND SENTENCE.

THE heart of Frank Shields, on hearing the words of the pirate chief, sunk from hope to despair.

Already he had pictured, since his escape, his being able to prove himself innocent of the murder of Louis Vale, and hope arose in his heart that he would yet rise from the dishonor in which circumstances had placed him and claim Helen Hayward as his wife.

Now, hope gave place to despair, and he turned deadly pale, though his nerve did not desert him, and he faced the pirate with undaunted mien.

"You are the condemned student, Frank Shields?" said Captain Morte.

"I am, and you are Rupert Mortimer, the pirate and kidnapper," was the calmly fearless reply.

"I am Captain Morte, the pirate, sir, and I am master here, as you will discover."

"And you fail to recognize one who once served you well," said the ex-jailer, whom the chief had failed to notice.

"Ah! Walter, is it you?—and I find you with this man, Shields, who is doubtless escaping from jail," and Captain Morte turned toward the ex-jailer who, in aiding his escape had lost his position and the respect of the community.

"Yes, we meet again, Master Rupert, after some years, and for the sake of the service I did you, I may hope that you will release my comrades and myself," said William Walter.

"You were paid for that service, and paid well, Walter," was the reply.

"I was paid for allowing you to escape, and I did so because I hated to see you die on the gallows, Rupert Mortimer; but I was not paid for the agony I suffered in being disgraced for the act, nor can I ever be."

"It seems that you are up to your old tricks again—saving necks from the noose," sneered Captain Morte.

"I am on my way to Boston with my friends, and I hope that you will allow us to land and continue on our journey."

"I will do no such thing."

"Well, Master Rupert, I heard that you had turned pirate, but I did not believe that even a buccaneer could forget a service such as I rendered you," was the bold response of William Walter.

The face of Captain Morte flushed, and he said quickly, for he saw that his crew were taking in all that was said:

"I have not forgotten your service, Walter, and I will not only set you free, but pay you for your vessel."

"This is like your old self, Master Rupert."

"But, who is that man?" and the pirate pointed to the skipper.

"A coast fisherman, and a friend of mine."

"And that man?"

"A friend of mine who is interested with me in business."

"Ah! well, you three can go free."

"And, Master Rupert, what about my other friend?"

"He must remain."

"Remain on this vessel?"

"Yes."

"But—"

"I will hear nothing more on the subject, Walter, for the young man must remain."

Here, Duval, pay this man what he considers his smack worth."

"She is worth a thousand at least," assured Walter, anxious to make out of the pirate all that he could.

"And the cargo, you forget?" put in the skipper, with an eye to business.

"Yes, I had forgotten that," answered Walter.

"Will two thousand dollars pay you, Walter?"

"Yes, captain, it will just about cover the loss."

"Then pay him that sum, Duval."

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the pirate lieutenant, who acted as paymaster of the outlaw's vessel.

"I will claim nothing, Master Rupert, if you will only let my friend go free with us," said William Walter, as the lieutenant handed him the bag of gold containing the sum agreed on.

"I pay you because you once served me well, and I release you for the same reason."

"It is not my habit to pay out, but to take, and you may consider yourself in luck, for neither is it my way to spare life but to take it."

"And you will keep the student on board?"

"I certainly shall."

"You will not harm him?"

"I will carry out the sentence of the law upon him. He was doomed to die upon the gallows, and I will pass sentence upon him of another kind, and be merciful."

"I thank you for that, Master Rupert," said Walter, while Frank Shields stood silent and stern, looking on.

"Yes," continued Captain Morte. "I will allow him to take his death in his own hands and walk the plank to perdition."

All started at this terrible sentence, and though Frank Shields was horrified, not a muscle of his face changed, and his bright, fearless eyes met those of the pirate chief unflinchingly.

"Good God! you will not do that cruel wrong, captain?" cried William Walter.

"I will! and I now sentence him for the second time, and my sentence is that he shall this night walk the plank."

"Duval, put that man in irons until he is wanted," and so ordering the pirate captain left the desk, while William Walter and his unfortunate companions stood aghast at the fearful sentence that had been passed upon the poor student after his escape from a fate that could not have been worse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE JEW PEDDLER.

A WEEK passed away after the capture of the smack by the Winged Witch, as Captain Morte had named his vessel, and the little seaport town that had been the scene of so much excitement of late had not yet quieted down.

The fact is, the remarkable escape of Frank Shields from jail had put the people in a ferment, and the greatest effort had been made to find some trace of the prisoner, but without effect.

The jailer had told his story of how an officer of the navy had come with a prisoner, who had been so violent that he had been placed in the death cell.

This the others connected with the jail, and the driver of the vehicle, had corroborated, while the little craft that had brought them into port was boarded and her crew arrested.

All they could say was that the supposed officer had chartered them at a seaport up the coast to bring him and his prisoner there, and had paid them well for the work.

A note was found in the cell, which read:

"I regret to abuse the hospitality of even a jailer; but it is necessary under existing circumstances, for I have determined that my friend, Frank Shields, unjustly sentenced to die, shall not perish on the gallows."

"An expert with tools I let myself, my bogus prisoner, and the real one, out of this jail, and no pursuit need be attempted, for we will not be found."

There was no signature to the note, but it told the story of the escape, and, all the circumstances taken together, it cleared the jailer of complicity in the escape, in the minds of the officials, who could not really blame him for being taken in so cleverly, though many of the townspeople, remembering the bribery case of William Walter,

could not but think that his successor was in the secret.

As Frank Shields had certainly escaped, without hope of recapture, the affair became a nine-days' talk, and then the gossip turned upon the pledge that Helen Hayward had made to become the wife of a pirate.

All well knew that Rupert Mortimer, bold as he was and reckless, would not dare to come to claim his bride, and wondered how he would communicate with her.

Every effort had been made to meet him, should he run his vessel into port, and cruisers were running up and down the coast in the search for him, going south as far as the Delaware, and north to the Kennebec.

It was hoped most devoutly that some of the searchers would come up with him, for not only were there nearly half a score of American vessels-of-war on the hunt, but several English cruisers in those waters had joined in the lookout.

As the pirate chief had said that Helen would hear from him when the month went by, it was certain that he expected to be on hand at the time, and that he had not left the coast was known, as there were vessels coming in almost daily that had been overhauled and robbed by the daring pirate.

These vessels reported the brig as possessed of phenomenal speed, carrying canvas sufficient for a vessel twice her tonnage, armed heavily and manned by a large crew so that it was very evident that Captain Morte felt it in his power to run away from any vessel too heavy for him to fight, and to make a good fight if driven to it.

And poor Helen Hayward? I hear the reader ask.

She went about her home, white-faced and calm, but it was evident that she suffered more than eye could see, and anxiously asked her father when he returned to his home to meals if there was any news of the capture of the pirate.

"No news."

This was his invariable reply, unless it was varied by a story told by some incoming vessel that had suffered at the hands of the buccaneer.

When Mr. Hayward had made known to Helen the escape of Frank Shields, it was at the breakfast-table, when a messenger from his officer brought him the news.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Helen, and burying her face in her hands she burst into tears.

Her mother, a cold-hearted, ambitious woman of the world, said severely:

"Helen, what do you mean?"

But her father had not the heart to scold her, and gently led her to her room.

"Do you know aught of this escape, my child?" he asked in a tone of kindness.

"Why do you ask me, father?" she answered, in a distressed tone.

"I have noticed that you have had a visitor of late who was a stranger to me, and—"

"Father, you need ask me no more, for I will tell you frankly that I did aid in the escape of Frank Shields. More I will not tell you, and, but for you I would not now be pledged to become a pirate's wife, but be happy with the man I love; so do not censure me more, and do not let the public know that I saved poor Frank from the gallows, for it will do no good and only bring more sorrow upon your already unhappy daughter."

Mr. Hayward was deeply touched at her wretchedness, and amazed that she had in such a masterly manner released the condemned prisoner; but he said, simply:

"I will keep the secret, Helen, but I am happy that you did not fly with him."

"It would have been better had I done so, than become what I have pledged myself to be," she said, bitterly.

"And you really mean to keep this foolish pledge to that dastard buccaneer?"

"I do."

"I will never permit it!"

"It depends upon me, sir, not on you. A sacrifice was demanded; I made it, and I will live up to my pledged word, for he trusted in my word and released me when he had me in his power."

With a deprecating gesture Mr. Hayward left the room, and Helen remained alone, refusing admission to her mother's knock when she called to see her.

Some days after when alone in her room her maid, Lucy, came and whispered outside:

"It is me, Miss Helen."

Opening the door for her Helen saw that Lucy had something to tell, for her manner was mysterious.

"What is it, Lucy?" she asked.

"A man is in the Sea View Arbor, miss, and wants to see you."

"A man? Who is he?"

"A Jew peddler."

"What does he want with me?"

"He came to the house and worried your mother nearly to death to buy some of his wares, and she left him in disgust, after telling him to get out; but he would not go, and she sent me to tell him if he did not clear out, she would send for a constable. I told him, miss, and he said, in a whisper:

"Joost tells Mish Helen dat I must speak mit her at t'e arbor vat looks over mit t'e vaters," and Lucy mimicked the accent in a way that made Helen smile in spite of her distress.

"I know of but one Jew that could wish to see me that I can remember of, and it cannot possibly be that one," said Helen, thoughtfully.

"Miss Helen, it is my idea that it isn't a real Jew," whispered Lucy.

Helen started, her face flushed, and she said, hastily:

"Find out where my mother is, and if I can leave the house without her seeing me, and I will go and see this Jew peddler."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MASK REMOVED.

LUCY was gone but a few moments, and then returned to report that Mrs. Hayward was dressing to go out visiting, doubtless to learn all she could of the gossip floating about the town, and in which her daughter's name was so often mentioned.

"Then you must go to the Sea View Arbor, for fear the man may go away, as mother will take some time to get ready."

"What shall I tell him, miss?"

"Say that I am detained at present, but will come as soon as I can."

Lucy slipped quietly out of the house on her mission, and found the Jew peddler waiting patiently in the arbor, and consoling himself by smoking a pipe.

"Ah, you vas t'e gurrul, Lucy," said the Jew, with a smile.

"Yes, I vas Lucy t'e gurrul," said the pert maid, mimicking the Jew's accent.

"Vell, you vas a pretty gurrul, mine young fri'nt."

"It vas more ash I can says for you, mine olt fri'nt," responded Lucy, with a serious face.

"Dat vas so," resignedly remarked the Jew, while Lucy added in her natural tone:

"I told Miss Helen."

"Ah, dat vas good mit you leetle gurruls, ant I vas gives you somedings from my pack."

"I don't believe you have anything in your pack worthy of my acceptance," and Lucy turned up her nose.

"Dat vas maybe so; but vat did Mish Haywards say?"

"That you were to remain here until she came."

"Maybe she don't comes."

"Yes, she will be here as soon as her mother leaves the house."

"T'e olt ladys vas a tigers, don't she?"

Lucy laughed heartily and replied:

"I only wish t'e olt ladys, as you call her, could hear you."

"Vell, I don't vas vish so, for she makes my heat break mit a stick, maybe."

"Maybe she would; but you wait here for Miss Helen," and Lucy hastened back to the house and reported to her young mistress that her mother was just starting off in the carriage and that the Jew was waiting in the arbor.

"I will go at once, and you come into the garden, Lucy, to be near if I should need you."

So saying Helen left the house, and, accompanied by Lucy, walked toward the Sea View Arbor.

"You wait here, Lucy," she said, as they passed a rustic seat near a bed of flowers, and then she glided on to the rendezvous with the peddler.

It was the same arbor where Frank Shields had had the scene with Mr. Hayward, and parted with Helen, and the spot held bitter memories for her.

But, nerving herself to meet whom she might, and hear the worst, for she felt confident that the Jew peddler was either her lover or a messenger from him, she walked boldly forward.

Seeing her approach the Jew arose and bowed politely, while he observed in his quaint way:

"I was glad to see you, mish."

"You asked to see me here, sir," and Helen tried to see if she could discover any trace of a resemblance in the man before her to Frank Shields.

But, with a sigh of disappointment, she was compelled to mentally confess that she could not.

"Are we alone mit ourselves, mish?"

"Yes, though my maid is not far away," and thinking suddenly that the man might be Rupert Mortimer in disguise, she added quickly:

"And the men-servants are within call."

"Ah! I was don't vant to see dem, mish."

Then, dropping his accent and rising to his full height from the stooping posture he had assumed, he said:

"I am William Walter, Miss Hayward."

Helen started in spite of herself, so complete was his disguise, so unexpected this announcement as to who he really was.

"Indeed, sir, I would never have known you."

"It is best that I do not show my face here at this time, Miss Hayward."

"You are right, and I must thank you from my heart for the noble manner in which you kept your promise to me and did the work," and Helen spoke earnestly.

"Ah, Miss Hayward, it is to tell you a cruel story that I have come here."

She turned a shade paler and gasped out:

"Oh, do not tell me that he has been retaken."

"Miss Hayward, nerve yourself to hear a bitter story, for poor Mr. Shields was retaken, captured by Captain Morte, the pirate, and he was cruelly put to death," and as he uttered the last word William Walter sprung forward and caught Helen in his arms to prevent her falling, for every particle of life seemed to leave her at the cruel tidings brought to her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EX-JAILER'S STORY.

"No, no, I am not going to faint; I am strong now to bear all."

Helen uttered the words as she rallied from a deep swoon, believing that she had not lost consciousness.

When she sunk heavily into his arms, William Walter, remembering what she had said about her maid being near, hastened to look for her.

He found Lucy, and told her what had happened, and she hastened off to the mansion for restoratives.

After some trouble she was restored to consciousness, and at once began her entreaties to Walter to tell her all.

"It is a sad story, Miss Hayward, and a long one, if I tell you all."

"Tell me all— No, Lucy, you need not go, for I want you near me; I need you," she said to her maid, who had turned to walk away, and then she added:

"Speak out, sir, for my faithful Lucy knows all."

"You know, Miss Hayward, of our successful escape, and the manner in which it was accomplished?"

"Yes, it was in everybody's mouth, and you deserve great credit for your splendid plot."

"Thank you. At first Mr. Shields did not wish to go; but your letter decided him, and we safely left the jail and reached the little smack, which I had ordered to this port to be ready for us."

"We ran out to sea, and all was going well, as we were on our way to Boston, when suddenly I was awakened by the deep boom of a gun, for I had turned in for a rest and Mr. Shields had the helm."

"I found a brig-of-war in chase of us, upon going on deck, and that Mr. Shields was determined not to heed her shot to come to."

"Finding that we did not obey his summons, he commenced a hot chase, and then an unlucky shot cut down our mast."

"We took our little yawl, but it was a long pull to the nearest shore, an island, and the sea was rough, while, to add to our misfortune, a broadside was sent after us, one shot splintering an oar."

"Well, Miss Hayward, we were captured, and then we found that our captor was Rupert Mortimer."

"Oh, God!" groaned poor Helen, burying her face in her hands.

"He at once recognized Mr. Shields as the student who had rescued you from him the night he attempted to kidnap you, and whom he also seemed to know as the man accused of killing Mr. Vale."

"He also recognized me, for you will remember that I had served him well once."

"Yes, I remember, you saved his life."

"I did, Miss Hayward, and in return for that service he told me that I should go, with my two comrades, but that Mr. Shields should remain."

"I begged for Mr. Shields until I angered the pirate, who refused to listen to me."

"He paid me for the smack, which her skipper valued at a high figure when he put it at five hundred dollars; but I felt that I could get more, so charged him two thousand dollars, which he and his lieutenant gave to me, and therefore you can get back fifteen hundred dollars of the sum you have paid out."

"No, no; not one dollar of the money would I touch."

"Keep it; and more, every dollar that you have expended for me I shall return."

"Not if I keep the money over after paying for the smack, for I gave the skipper his five hundred."

"Yes, every dollar do you let me know of your spending, for I have ample to repay all."

"Well, miss, besides the money you gave me, when I last saw you here, there will be one hundred due."

"Lucy, go to the house, please, and get my purse."

"I beg that you do not pay me that."

"Yes, for I wish to owe nothing to what you received from that man."

Lucy soon returned, and Helen's pecuniary obligation being settled, this, together with the five hundred dollars she had given poor Frank Shields, left her but very little of the three thousand which she had gotten upon her diamonds.

"Now let me hear your story in full," said Helen, nerving herself to listen to the worst.

"To end my part in the affair, Miss Hayward, I will say that Captain Morte, as he is known, hailed a coaster and placed me and my two comrades on board of her, when we were landed at Newport, and I came directly on here to see you, as soon as I could rig myself out in this disguise, while my shipmates returned to Boston."

"But it was before we left the pirate deck that he perpetrated the cruel deed which I hope some day to be able to get a chance to avenge, for he took the life of that noble young student."

"Tell me all."

"It had better be left unsaid."

"No, I must know all."

"Suffice it, Miss Hayward, that I saw him die."

"I must know how he died," was Helen's stern response.

"Then I will tell you, as you demand it, though it pains me to do so."

"Captain Morte seemed most bitter against the poor student, and—"

"I think I can understand his bitterness," said Helen.

"He told him that he should die, and had him put in irons."

"After nightfall he ordered him brought upon deck, his irons still being upon his wrists."

"It was blowing fresh and the waves ran high, but a plank was run out over the lee quarter, and—"

"My God! he made him walk the plank?" groaned Helen.

"Yes; he ordered a heavy shot to be riveted to the chain of the manacles, and this poor Mr. Shields was forced to carry in his hands, Captain Morte telling him that it

would hasten him on his course to perdition and death."

"The inhuman monster."

"Such he is, miss; but he did not get Mr. Shields to show one atom of weakness."

"He ascended the plank fearless and firm, and called me to him."

"Here, Mr. Walter," he said, "take this ring from my finger and give it to Miss Hayward from me."

"Tell her that my soul goes out with this last gift to her."

"Then he bade me good-by, holding the iron ball in one hand as he did so, and with a strength that surprised me."

"Turning to Captain Morte he called out:

"Well, Sir Pirate, I await orders, and am ready to meet my fate as a brave man should."

"And the pirate?" eagerly asked Helen.

"He ordered the student to walk, while he added:

"Thus ends your career on earth, Frank Shields."

"With firm step, and a nod to me, the bold man walked out on the plank, and never faltered when it tipped with him."

"Down he went into the wild waters, which swept over him, while the brig passed on."

"But if I live a hundred years, Miss Hayward, I will never forget that night."

"Nor will I," answered Helen, in a low tone.

Then rising she took the ring that Walter held out to her and said:

"Your hand touched his last; place it upon this finger."

It was the wedding finger, and the man obeyed.

"Now farewell, and believe that I thank you for all that you have done."

"Some day I may need you again, and if I do—"

She hesitated, while he added:

"Command me, Miss Hayward, in everything, and I will serve you without price."

"Thank you. Come, Lucy," and she walked back toward the mansion with a firm step, while William Walter shouldered his pack and departed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LORD STANWIX SEDGEMOOR.

THE day following the sad story of the ex-jailer, a vessel-of-war put into port flying the English flag.

It was a brig, and enough like the Winged Witch to have been a sister ship.

In fact, so closely did she resemble that craft that the fort allowed her to pass, and then, when well under its guns, demanded it to come to, and then sent a boarding-party to see if the vessel had been taken by her own men.

Instead, the officer returned with the information that the vessel was his British majesty's brig-of-war Playful, and that she had come into port for provisions.

She was commanded by a young nobleman, Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor, or rather who was called my lord from courtesy, as he was a younger son, and it had never been proven that a long-absent elder brother was dead, though he had been missing for years from the family roof-tree in old England.

Captain Sedgemoor was received with distinguished kindness by the citizens, and, while his vessel was undergoing repairs and getting stores he was invited to become the guest of Mr. Hayward, to whom he brought a letter of introduction from a friend in England.

He accepted the invitation, and Helen was called upon, in all her wretchedness, to entertain a guest.

But the young Englishman had heard her story, from her father's lips, and meeting her, became most deeply interested in the beautiful girl.

His handsome face, noble mien, and sympathetic manner, quite won her to him, and then she told him of her pledge to Captain Morte.

"I heard something of this, Miss Hayward, from your father, and a gentleman whom I met also told me of other causes for your unhappiness, and you have my fullest, deepest sympathy; but surely you do not intend to keep the pledge?" said Lord Stanwix,

"Yes, I intend to keep it."

"An oath, or a pledge, forced from one is not binding."

"It is with me, sir."

"And you persist upon keeping your word?"

"I do."

"Have you any idea when the pirate will call upon you to fulfill your promise?"

"My month of probation will be up in just two weeks from to-day," said Helen, sadly.

"Do you expect the outlaw to call at your home for you?"

"I know not what he will do."

"Should he do so?"

"I will not betray him."

"And will you go with him?"

"Yes."

"You knew him before he took to piracy, I believe?"

"Yes."

"He professes to love you?"

"He says that he does."

"This is remarkable; but I will see just what can be done for you, Miss Hayward."

"Nothing can be done, Lord Stanwix, and I must accept my fate."

"Will you not promise to communicate with me when you hear from this pirate?"

"No, I cannot."

"You will not let me aid you then?"

"Not by treachery."

"By treachery?"

"Yes, and I wish you to understand me, my lord."

"We were wholly in that man's power, and he spared all, even releasing me, upon my pledge to sacrifice myself for others."

"I gave the pledge, and he trusted me, and I will not be treacherous to him, though gladly would I have death intervene to save me from him."

"I fully understand your position, Miss Hayward, and I will do all that I can for you."

"As the pirate expects to claim you within two weeks, he must be now somewhere on this coast; in fact, vessels coming in report him as in this neighborhood, so I will hasten to see and try to have death intervene between you and the cruel fate you have pledged yourself to."

"You mean his death?"

"Of course."

"Oh! if it could only be, and if not his, mine, for I am so tired of all this agony of heart and soul."

Lord Stanwix left the mansion and hastened down-town.

When Mr. Hayward returned home that evening he said that Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor had gone on board his vessel that morning, hurried repairs through at a tremendous rate gotten what supplies and ammunition he needed, and sailed at dark, sending his excuses to Mrs. Hayward and Helen for not being able to say farewell.

Helen knew that the brave young Englishman had gone on her account, and she murmured:

"God bless and protect him."

Mr. Hayward also reported that a New York packet-ship bound to Portland, had been chased into port just at dark, by the Winged Witch, and that the British brig Playful had spoken her in the offing and gone in chase of the pirate, and the town was wild with suspense hoping that the daring Sea Desperado would be taken, and Helen's fearful fate thus averted.

And Helen, as she lay tossing upon her pillow that night remembered the promise of the English commander, that "Death should intervene to save her from becoming the bride of the buccaneer."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE TRACK OF THE ENEMY.

THOUGH Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor had hastened his preparations to get to sea, he had not slighted an important item in fitting out and supplying his vessel.

It is true that his officers would have been glad to have taken a week in the pleasant port to fit out their craft, but they were ready to obey the command of their idolized captain at any time.

And Lord Stanwix, feeling that not a moment was to be lost if Helen Hayward was to be saved from the buccaneer, at once determined to put to sea.

His vessel was dearer to him than all else in the world, and, a favorite with the British Admiralty, he had been given a free commission to cruise *ad libitum*, so he was bound by no time or orders, and could do pretty much as he pleased.

Captain Morte had proven a great foe to the merchant marine of Great Britain, when cruising in his lateen-rigged vessel, and the young English captain felt that it would be a feather in his cap to capture the noted sea-rover, aside from his desire to aid Helen.

"Men, I am going on a cruise after Morte, the Sea Desperado, and I wish every man to be on the alert to do even more than his duty," he had said, as his vessel got under way.

On the run out of the harbor the crew were busy putting things into shipshape, and by the time blue water was reached the Playful was in splendid fighting-trim.

She was a beautiful vessel, with not a ton's difference from the Winged Witch in size, while her armament was equal in guns, though the pirate's caliber was a trifle larger.

In men, too, she was about equal, so that if the buccaneer was brought to bay, it could not but prove a close combat, Captain Stanwix Sedgemoor well knew.

The Playful, too, was a very rapid sailer, never having met her equal in her own service, and holding her own with several of the swiftest roving cruisers on this side of the Atlantic, when friendly bets had been indulged in.

By bending on larger canvas which he had on board, Captain Sedgemoor felt that the Playful would match the pirate in speed, and once he sighted him, he was determined never to let him get out of his way.

Seeing the packet-ship sweeping in under full sail, Captain Sedgemoor ordered his helmsman to pass near, and hailed:

"Ho, the ship!"

"Ay, ay, sir, what cruiser is that?" came in a hoarse voice from the ship, anticipating the question that Lord Stanwix would have asked.

"His British majesty's brig-of-war, Playful!"

"What ship is that?"

"The Carrier Dove, out of New York for Portland, and chased in here by a pirate brig, which you can just see in the offing."

The answer brought three hearty English cheers from the crew of the Playful as she swept on, and the men of the Carrier Dove responded to them as they saw the British cruiser fairly flying through the waters.

"Ho, lads, we'll rig our larger canvas," cried the young captain, and it being brought from the hold, sail by sail was bent on, as the brig dashed along merrily, urged by a nine-knot breeze.

The increased size of the sails, though the difference was hardly noticeable before, sent the Playful along at a pace that made all on board feel that the Winged Witch would be fast indeed if she could keep ahead of her.

The course of the channel had prevented yet awhile a test as to whether the cruiser was gaining on the pirate, which had squared his sails when giving up his chase of the packet-ship, and was sailing leisurely along on a southerly course.

At last the Playful gained the open water and headed on a tack that would bring her across the bows of the pirate a few miles onward, if he did not increase his rate of sailing.

It was a moonlight night, and the brig was visible a league or more distant, and flying considerable canvas.

It certainly did not seem as though she was, and Captain Sedgemoor ordered every stitch of canvas set that would draw a capful of wind.

The pirate, however, was not seen to set more sail, which he would do if so inclined, and yet seemed to hold his own.

Anyhow, it was very certain that when the two vessels came together, at the point for which both were heading, it would be seen which was the faster sailer.

Nearer and nearer they drew toward the given point, and the Playful, though doing splendidly with all her canvas, was not gaining an inch upon the other brig, which, with less sail, certainly proved her superiority.

"He is rigged with spars large enough

for a ship of the line," said Lord Stanwix, regarding the pirate carefully through his glass.

"It would be a great thing, sir, to capture that beautiful craft," said the first luff.

"It would indeed, Vane, and I shall hang to him to the bitter end."

"You think there is no doubt then as to his being the pirate, sir?"

"No; it is the same sail pointed out to us by the packet, and his brig is certainly the counterpart of this one, as everybody in port told us that it was."

"He seems in no humor to run from us, sir."

"He knows his speed, and sees that we are doing our best in this light wind; but I believe in a blow we can beat him carrying canvas, with those heavy spars of his."

"He seems to have the depth to uphold them, sir, with all the sail he chooses to spread on, for you notice he sails on a level keel almost, while we are lying well over."

"You are right, Vane, but we will soon be near enough to give him our compliments, so order the men quietly to quarters."

The order was promptly obeyed, and in ten minutes' time the Playful was in full fighting-trim, and another quarter of an hour must bring the two brigs to close quarters, unless one or the other of them changed its course.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BATTLE OF THE BRIGS.

ALL was silent on board the Playful, as the two vessels neared each other, and every eye was turned upon the pirate, as the stranger was certainly set down to be.

The men knew enough of Captain Morte to feel that he was a man who would not run away from a foe, where he had equal chances, and that he still held on his course, apparently taking no notice of the Playful, showed that he either looked upon her as an armed merchantman, or an antagonist from whom he had little to fear.

The crew of the Playful, at their guns, were stripped to the waist, and the marines stood ready to pour in a hot fire of small-arms, while there was a band of gallant borderers gathered aft ready to follow their young captain should the fight be alongside.

Not a man spoke forward, and aft only a word was heard now and then, as Lord Stanwix addressed an officer, or gave an order to his helmsman.

On the pirate all seemed equally silent.

Not an extra sail had been set since the Playful was sighted, not a port had been opened, and only the lookout at the mast-head and the two helmsmen could be discerned with the glass by the closest scrutiny.

Ascending to the mast-head, Lord Stanwix bent his glass upon the vessel and gazed for a long time at her, searching the deck from stem to stern.

"Well, Vane," he said, as he descended, "the brig is certainly a beauty, and I am convinced can outsail us easily, fast as we are."

"What do you make of her, sir?"

"She mounts the same number of guns that we do, only I think her stern and bow pivots are of heavier metal."

"And her crew, sir?"

"Not a man over four is to be seen."

"This is strange, my lord."

"Yes, but he has them on board."

"There are two men at the wheel, a lookout at the mast-head, and there is a hammock, swung between the mainmast and the carriage of the stern pivot-gun, in which a man, evidently an officer, is reclining."

"Once I saw a form glide to his side and then disappear, and I am confident he was giving him points as to what we were about."

"He takes it easy, sir."

"He does indeed; but we are near enough to open on him now, and I shall see if I can rouse him from that hammock."

"Send a shot across his bows, Mr. Vane."

The officer gave the necessary orders, and the deep boom of the gun quickly followed.

But not a movement on board the other vessel indicated that her crew had even heard the report.

"Try it again, sir!" ordered Captain Sedgemoor.

Again the gun boomed forth its deep note, and still not the slightest notice was taken of it on board the stranger.

"Fire a shot astern of him, sir!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" called out a gunner, and a heavy shot struck a couple of fathoms astern of the stranger, throwing the spray upon his decks.

"I do not wish to fire upon him unless I am sure it is the pirate, so I'll send a shot through his rigging, to see if he'll take the hint."

The order was given, the shot went on its way, shivering a spar, and instantly the side of the stranger blazed forth a line of fire, and her broadside came crashing upon the Playful in a manner that was a surprise, and did much damage.

"At your guns there! aim true! fire!"

The shout came from Lord Stanwix, and the Playful returned her broadside and with good effect.

Still the two vessels held on their course as before, and which must bring them together in a very few minutes.

Once the pirate had opened he fired rapidly, and the flash of his guns illumined the huge black flag which had gone up to his peak with the broadside he had fired.

The Playful hotly returned the fire, and nearing each other rapidly all the while, the havoc was great upon either vessel.

But neither Englishman nor pirate flinched, and soon the range became at pistol-shot distance, and small-arms mingled their deadly rattle with the deep boom of the heavy guns.

A moment more and the two brigs touched, the grapnels were thrown, and the boards from each craft met upon the bulwarks.

Here the fighting became terrible, in a hand-to-hand encounter, and seemingly evenly matched in numbers and courage, neither side could beat the other back, until suddenly Lord Stanwix reeled and fell back into the arms of his men.

"Throw me on the deck and keep up the fight!"

"Vane, you are in command," cried the gallant young officer.

"Lieutenant Vane is dead, sir," cried a middy.

"Then tell Gregory to take com—"

But the sentence was not finished, for another wound was received by the gallant Englishman and he was borne back to his cabin.

At the same moment the pirates made an onslaught with terrific fury; but suddenly they were recalled by a loud voice, they cast loose the grapnels as they fell back, and the two brigs swung apart, each one most willing to withdraw from the desperate combat.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PLAYFUL'S RETURN.

It was the day after the sailing of the brig-of-war Playful in search of the pirate.

The townspeople were anxiously hoping for tidings, for a vessel had come in early in the morning and reported a terrific battle raging between two brigs some leagues down the coast.

It could be none other than the Playful and the Winged Witch all knew.

Had the British craft defeated the pirate?

Had the pirate defeated the British craft?

These questions were asked again and again, but none could answer them.

That the pirate had fought hard there could be no doubt, for all the morning tidings came in that terrific firing had been heard after midnight far out at sea.

In the afternoon Helen Hayward went to the Sea View Arbor, accompanied by her faithful maid, for she disliked to be alone.

Hardly had she taken a seat there, when a vessel rounded a wooded point of the coast below.

"It is the brig!" cried Helen, eagerly.

"Which brig, Miss Helen?" asked Lucy.

"Ah, yes; which one? for the British vessel and the pirate are both brigs and strangely alike," said Helen, sadly.

"It is the Playful, Miss Helen, for now I see her flag," cried Lucy.

"Yes, and alone; but see, she comes very slowly, and she seems crippled."

Watching the vessel as it drew nearer, the two saw that her sails were riddled with shot-holes, her masts and spars were wounded, and her bulwarks presented gaping fissures where an iron hail had passed through.

She had been in a fierce action, that was certain.

But upon her decks discipline held her crew, for the men were at their posts of duty, officers paced to and fro with easy tread, and all had the appearance of having passed through no fearful ordeal.

The pretty craft glided into the harbor, saluted the fort, and dropped anchor off the town, while half a dozen shore-boats rowed out to her to glean what news there was.

One of these boats Helen recognized as her father's, and watching attentively, half an hour after she saw the brig's cutter coming shoreward.

An awning was over the stern, and the men pulled with slow and measured sweep.

Not for the town did the boat head, but for the landing near the Hayward mansion.

What could it mean?

This question Helen asked Lucy over and over again.

At last the cutter ran in to the shore, and half a dozen seamen jumped out into the water to the dozen knees.

Then upon their shoulders was raised a litter upon which rested a human form.

Up the hillside the men came bearing their load, while before them Helen beheld her father and an officer and man from the ship.

"Oh, Lucy! I fear Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor has been either killed or wounded, and father is having him brought to the mansion."

"Come, let us go."

They left the arbor and hastened to the mansion, where Helen found her mother busy preparing a guest's room for Lord Sedgemoor, Mr. Hayward having sent a messenger on ahead to say that the young officer had been twice severely wounded, and that he was bringing him to the house where he could be well cared for.

Soon the party arrived, and Helen, from her window, saw that the handsome young Englishman looked very white and haggard, as he lay upon the stretcher with his eyes closed.

Into the room the seamen bore him, and then he was tenderly lifted to the bed.

The men were then dismissed, to return to the brig, their captain thanking them in a low tone; but the surgeon of the Playful, and the servant of Lord Stanwix remained with the wounded commander at the mansion, upon which a hush now fell.

Helen could stand the suspense no longer.

She must know if the Englishman was mortally wounded, and if the pirate had been captured.

Quietly she went down-stairs, and met her father in the hall.

"Oh, father! what has happened?" she asked.

He led her into the library and answered:

"Helen, the Playful has returned."

"I saw her enter the harbor, all torn and scarred, as though she had been in a fearful battle."

"She has."

"With the pirate?"

"Yes."

"Father, please tell me all that has occurred, for Lord Stanwix looked so white and haggard, as I saw them bear him beneath the window."

"He was twice severely wounded, once with a sword-thrust, and once with a pistol-shot."

"His surgeon pronounces the wounds dangerous, though not necessarily fatal, and says that he must have the utmost quiet and devoted nursing, and on that account I had him brought here."

"Oh! I'm so sorry for him, sir; but what of the pirate?" and Helen asked the last question as though she dreaded an answer.

"To tell you all, my child, I must say that the Playful sighted the Winged Witch in the offing, and gave chase."

"The pirate did not seek or shun a battle, and when fired upon, answered with a broadside."

"The vessels, the guns and the crews were most evenly matched, and the result was a drawn battle, each craft swinging off and leaving the action as though by common consent."

"The Playful lost Lieutenant Vane and two middies, and a score of men killed, and twice as many wounded while she suffered severely in hull and rigging."

"A fearful loss, father; but what of the pirate?"

"She suffered also severely in killed and

wounded, though it is not known how many."

"Father, why are you so obtuse, or so neglectful as not to tell me if that man was killed or wounded?"

"You mean Captain Morte?" asked Mr. Hayward, with provoking calmness, though Helen could not believe that he would thus trifle with her.

"Yes, of course, for who else could you think I meant, father, when you know the precipice upon which I stand waiting?" and Helen spoke with considerable indignation in her tone.

"Forgive me, my child, if I seemed remiss; but, the fact is, I am all worked up by this affair and the occurrences of the past few days; but, to answer your question, Lord Stanwix said that his first wound was given him by the pirate captain himself, who drove his sword into his body."

"As he fell, Lord Stanwix fired upon Rupert Mortimer, and says that he saw him stagger back into the arms of his men, and, from their giving up the battle as they did he hopes and believes that he killed him."

"God grant that he did," fervently said Helen, and then she added:

"And now, father, knowing as I do that Lord Stanwix went out to seek that man to save me from the fate that threatened me, I beg you to let me care for him as I would for a brother."

Mr. Hayward was glad to hear this, for, like his wife, he was an ambitious man, and it was in the hope of making a match between Helen and the nobleman, that he had urged his coming to his home.

So he said with eagerness:

"You are a noble girl, Helen, and you shall have your way, so make up your mind that Rupert Mortimer will trouble you no more, and devote yourself as a nurse to Lord Stanwix."

Happy at having something to occupy her, and take her thoughts away from herself, Helen devoted herself to her duty of caring for the man who, she felt, had sought to kill Captain Morte to save her from him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WOUNDED CHIEF.

SOME days had come and gone since the battle of the brigs, and the expiration of the month given Helen Hayward was at hand.

As soon as the Playful had returned, reporting her battle with the Winged Witch, and that she had left her crippled, or at least glad to draw out of the fight, couriers had been dispatched up and down the coast to the seaports, to warn cruisers of the vicinity of the pirate, and small craft had also been sent on the same mission with the hope of falling in with some vessels-of-war.

As on a former occasion a large barque had been hastily armed with guns from the fort, and manned by a volunteer crew, to go in pursuit, and strong hopes were held that the famous desperado of the sea would this time be captured, as he was certainly in a crippled condition.

But the days had gone by and no news came of the capture of the Winged Witch, so that people began to despair of hearing such glad tidings.

Still no news came of any other vessels having been boarded by the pirate, and when the barque sent in chase of her returned, bringing a boat, spars and other debris picked up floating near the scene of the battle, and reported having seen nothing of the brig, it was hoped that she had sunk with all on board, having been fatally wounded by the Playful.

This hope was added to by finding bodies along the beach that bore no wounds, and were dressed in the semi-sailor uniform of the Winged Witch.

As the time went by the belief that the brig had gone down with all on board gained ground, and a feeling of confidence again pervaded the community.

Helen heard all of these rumors, told her by her father, and smiled sadly, and hoped, as she would sit by the side of the wounded English officer; but there seemed to be a presentiment far down in her heart that Rupert Mortimer was not dead, and that she would find him on hand at the end of the month to claim the fulfilment of her pledge to him.

Could she have seen him, as he then lay upon a bed of suffering, grim, stern, and determined not to die, she would have felt hope that Death must claim him and thereby save her.

He had fought his vessel well, and was steadily gaining a foothold upon the British brig, when he came face to face with her commander.

Springing forward he had driven his sword into the breast of Lord Stanwix, and then, as he was about to urge his men to follow him, believing that now he was the victor, the wounded Englishman had fired and Captain Morte had fallen back into the arms of his men.

Revengeful to the last, he had fired his last shot at his foe, as he was being borne from the deck, and saw that he had hit, and hoped that he had killed his brave adversary.

But, without their leader, the pirates were anxious to retire from the battle, and Duval had quickly given the orders to cast off the grapnels.

The two vessels swung apart, and, crippled as was the brig, Captain Morte ordered her to be headed seaward as long as the Playful was in sight, and then to be put away with all speed for a secret retreat which he knew upon the coast near by.

Before dawn the Winged Witch dropped anchor in a small basin, the existence of which few who sailed along the coast knew, and the crew were set to work repairing damages and looking after the wounded.

In his cabin meanwhile, under the care of his Spanish surgeon, a man as skilled in surgery and drugs as he was in villainy, lay the wounded chief, and his men knew that his life hung by a thread.

Thus days passed, and a change came for the wounded pirate.

"I am better, Duval; I will not die," he said, grimly, to his lieutenant.

"I am delighted to hear it, Captain Morte, for I feared you had received your death-wound," answered his officer.

"No, I will not die yet, I feel, though it will be long before I am well.

"Now tell me of the brig."

"She is in the basin, where you ordered me to go just after you were wounded."

"And her wounds?"

"Were by no means as severe as yours, sir, for she is all shipshape once more."

"That is good, and the crew?"

"We buried fifteen poor fellows, sir, and have as many more between decks with wounds that keep them down."

"Not as bad as I feared; but that was a gallant foe we fought, Duval."

"He was indeed, sir, and he was an Englishman."

"Yes, and had the captain not fallen he would have given us more trouble, for he was a desperate fellow, and as soon as I could I ended him; but I was foolish to fight an armed vessel, and wish I had taken your advice and run for it."

"It cannot be helped now, sir, and you must now devote yourself to getting well, so do not worry or talk any more for the present."

"One minute, Duval."

"Yes, Captain Morte."

"What is the day of the month?"

"The twentieth, sir."

"Ah! then I have little time to lose, and as I cannot be on hand to keep an engagement, Duval, you must do it for me."

"I will sleep now, but to-morrow come to me and I will tell you what I wish you to do."

"Anything that I can do, Captain Morte, I will."

"I know that, Duval, and this mission I send you on is one that is full of peril to you, and which you must handle with gloves, for there is a woman in the case," and with a smile Captain Morte closed his eyes to rest, just as the Spanish surgeon entered and said angrily:

"Captain Morte, there are ninety-nine chances to one that you die, and here you are, chatting away as though you were at a dinner-party, and I must not have it any more."

"Bah, Sanchez, you will be hanged before I die," was the reply of the pirate captain, and his surgeon winced under the remark.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PIRATE'S MESSENGER.

MR. HAYWARD had gone down to his office, his wife was out on a usual round of visits among certain cronies, and Helen sat alone in the library engaged in reading, though, as her eyes often left the page before her and rested upon vacancy, it was very evident that her thoughts were not upon her book.

Lord Stanwix lay in his room under the care of his servant, for Helen was wont to take charge of the wounded man during the afternoon, when he seemed to feel easier, and she could read to him.

He was improving slowly, and the doctors had said that without any unfavorable symptoms coming on his recovery was certain.

Presently a firm step resounded upon the piazza, and the heavy brass knocker rung out a summons to the front door.

Knowing that no servant was just then at hand, Helen went to the door herself, thinking that it must be some one from the brig-of-war, or perhaps a neighbor.

She beheld instead a tall, uniformed man, with a handsome face that bore in it much that was attractive.

"May I ask if Miss Hayward is at home?" he said, bowing low, and with a courtly grace that showed the gentleman.

"I am Miss Hayward, sir; will you walk in?" answered Helen, wondering who he could be and why he had asked for her instead of her father or mother, as he appeared to be a naval officer.

"I am happy in meeting Miss Hayward, and will introduce myself as Lieutenant Dunmore, of the sea service."

Helen bowed and again invited her visitor to enter, which he did.

"Pardon my intrusion, Miss Hayward, but I come to see you upon a personal matter that I do not care to make known to others."

"Are we alone?" he said, seating himself as soon as Helen had done so.

"We are, sir, and may I ask why I am honored with this visit?" and Helen began to feel a trifle nervous.

"I would like to ask of you the terms of your pledge given a pirate chief some time since?"

Helen had almost expected that it was something in reference to the pirate that her visitor had come; but at his question she turned a shade paler and asked eagerly:

"Is that wretched man dead or alive, sir?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"That sea robber, Rupert Mortimer, who is known as Captain Morte, the pirate."

"Ah! it was to learn from you all that you could tell me, of your pledge to him that I came hither, Miss Hayward."

"Do you come as an officer of the navy, sir, seeking to learn from me all that will aid you to hunt down that man, or do you come from Captain Morte himself?" asked Helen sternly.

"Before I answer your question, Miss Hayward, I must ask that you promise me full secrecy in all that I make known to you, and, should it be necessary that I should meet any one here, that you introduce me as Lieutenant Dunmore, of the navy."

"This is a remarkable request, sir, if you are not that personage."

"My name is Dunmore, Miss Hayward, and I am a sailor."

"I have come to see you on a matter that deeply interests you, and I beg that you promise to follow my advice where it does you no harm."

"Will you do so?"

"Yes; for I wish this suspense ended, as I begin to feel that you come from one who, wicked as it may seem, I had hoped was dead."

"You refer to Captain Morte?"

"I do."

"And it is his messenger that I am," was the low reply.

Helen started to her feet, her eyes flashing, though she was deadly pale and trembled violently.

For a moment she seemed as though about to bound from the room, but her strange visitor said calmly:

"Sit down, please, Miss Hayward, and hear what I have to say."

"It may be better than you expect."

She sunk into her seat again and gasped:

"He lives, then?"

"Yes; but he is sorely wounded."

"Will he recover?" and the question came in a quick gasp.

"Yes, I think so."

"Where is he?"

"With his vessel."

"Rumor had it that it was sunk."

"You mean in the action with the brig-of-war?"

"Yes."

"She was crippled, lost heavily in her crew, and her commander was severely wounded, Miss Hayward; yet the Winged Witch still floats as dangerous and vicious as ever; but can you tell me the name of her plucky foe, and who her commander was, for she was a British vessel?"

"Yes; it was his British majesty's brig-of-war Playful, Captain Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor."

"Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor you said?" and the man was upon his feet, his face white, his form quivering.

Helen was amazed at his sudden and unexpected excitement, and answered:

"Yes, so I said, sir."

"Lord Stanwix Sedgemoor commanded that brig?"

"He did, sir."

"And his vessel is now in this port?"

"It is."

"May I ask if he was killed?" and the man spoke almost in a whisper.

"No, sir; but he was dangerously wounded; had he not been, it is believed that Captain Morte's career would have been ended ere this."

"Poor Stanwix! I hope he may recover," said the visitor, as though speaking his thoughts aloud.

"The surgeon says that there is every hope for him, sir, and when I saw him half an hour ago he was certainly looking better."

"You saw him half an hour ago?" asked the man in amazement.

"Yes, sir, for my father had him brought to our house, and his room is just across the hallway."

The visitor seemed almost shocked at this news, to judge from his face, and took several quick turns across the library and back, as though he was pacing a quarter-deck.

Suddenly stopping before Helen he said in a low, earnest tone:

"Miss Hayward, what you tell me surprises me deeply, and in my heart I hope that Lord Stanwix may recover."

"You know him then?"

He started at the question, but said, after some hesitation:

"I knew him long years ago; but let us speak now of yourself, for, as I told you, I come as a messenger from Captain Morte, the pirate."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRAW OF HOPE.

WONDERING at the emotion shown by the visitor at the mention of the name of Lord Stanwix, Helen was recalled to her own wretchedness by his remark that he was a messenger from Captain Morte.

"You said that Mr. Mortimer was severely wounded?" she said, by way of bringing the subject at once to a climax.

"Yes, and seriously."

"And he sent you to me?"

"He did."

"For what purpose?"

"You made him a pledge a month ago?"

"I did."

"The time is up."

"Yes."

"And he is unable to appear."

"Well, sir, what is to be done about it?" coldly asked Helen.

"It will be months before he is himself again, Miss Hayward."

"And must I suffer suspense all those months?" she asked, wearily.

"You pledged yourself, as I understand it, to become the wife of Captain Morte, if he released a vessel he had captured, her passengers and crew, and touched not a single dollar's worth of valuables?"

"I did, sir."

"You sacrificed yourself for them?"

"I did, for it was very evident to me that Captain Morte intended hanging one of the party, whose daughter is my dearest friend."

"For his sake, for her sake, and for all, when I felt that they could go free on my pledge I gave it."

"And you intended to keep it?"

"Of course, sir."

"It was very noble of you."

Helen made no reply, and the visitor continued:

"My captain—"

"Your captain, sir?"

"Yes, for I am first officer of the Winged Witch, Miss Hayward."

"Your appearance did not indicate, sir, that you had herded yourself with pirates," said Helen, with scorn.

The man flushed, and then answered:

"Circumstances beyond my control, Miss Hayward, made an outlaw of me, and once in the vortex of crime I have found it impossible to reach the shore of an honorable life once more."

He spoke with a feeling that caused Helen to pity him, and she said, with real sympathy in her tone:

"I feel sorry for you, sir; but let me understand, please, what your captain desires of me?"

"True, I should not keep you in suspense, so kindly pardon me for it, and let me know if it is your intention to still keep this pledge made to Captain Morte?"

"Assuredly."

"You are aware to what a life it will drag you down?"

"I am aware, sir, that in becoming a pirate's wife I could stoop to nothing worse," was the ringing response.

"And yet you prefer to become his wife to breaking your pledged word?"

"Do not misunderstand me, sir."

"I gave my pledged word, by all I held holy, to sacrifice myself."

"By that I saved others, and your captain trusted me and gave me one month before forcing me to keep my pledge."

"Did I refuse, I well know the terrible revenge he would wreak upon me and mine; yes, upon every one who was upon the vessel he captured that day, so I am content to continue being a sacrifice, rather than have follow what I know would."

"I had hoped that death might intervene to save me, that Captain Morte might be captured; but such has not been the case, unfortunately for me, and your chief still lives to claim my pledge."

"Perhaps when he comes to claim you he may relent."

"No, it is not the nature of Rupert Mortimer to give up a game he has once started to run down."

"You are right, Miss Hayward, and you have my deepest sympathy, when I tell you that Captain Morte, as we call him, sent me to you to say that he held your pledge as still binding, and that within three months' time you would see him, for he would come to claim its fulfillment of you."

"When he does, sir, I shall not shrink from keeping it, and so you can tell him," was the cold reply.

With a look that said plainly she considered the conversation at an end, Helen uttered these words, and Duval Dunmore arose, bowed, and moved toward the door.

There he turned, and said, earnestly:

"Miss Hayward, I will tell Captain Morte that you have renewed your pledge to him; but let me say to you, with my farewell, that you must not give up hope that all will come well, for the noble sacrifice you offer must never be demanded of you."

He turned quickly and departed, leaving Helen with a germ of hope in her heart, for she felt that he was no man to speak idle words, and in his had been a hidden meaning at which she clutched, as a drowning man might at a straw.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OUTLAW LIEUTENANT MAKES A SECOND VISIT.

DUVAL DUNMORE, the pirate lieutenant, was certainly a most daring man, or he would never have so openly and boldly played the part he did to gain an interview with Helen Hayward.

Departing from the mansion, he went back to his room at the inn, where the landlord treated him with distinguished consideration, believing that he was really an officer of the navy.

He had ordered the best room in the hotel, when he had arrived in the stage that morning, and had disposed of the choicest breakfast that could be given him, washing it down with a bottle of rare old wine.

Then he had arranged his toilet with care and gone to make his call upon Helen, with a result that is known to the reader.

Returning, he asked of his landlord where he could find the Messmates' Anchorage.

"That is not such a place as to suit one like you, sir," quickly said the landlord, fearful of losing a well-paying guest.

"I have no idea of leaving your hospitable house, landlord, as long as business detains me in your town; but I expect I may meet at such a place as the Messmates' Anchorage, a seaman whom I wish to see."

"Ah, yes, sir, it is the place to find seamen, and I will go there with you."

"No, thank you, only call a vehicle for me to drive there."

This was done, and Duval Dunmore entered the tap-room of the Anchorage.

Captain Tom sighted him, and, as naval officers never visited his place except to look up deserters or smugglers, he was on his dignity at once, and said sharply:

"You'll find no pirates, smugglers or deserters here, sir, for my house is a respectable one."

The lieutenant laughed lightly and answered:

"Are you Captain Tom?"

"That is what my particular friends call me, sir."

"Well, I shall have to claim that distinction, Captain Tom, and I wish to see you in private."

"I can see you here, sir."

"Pardon me, but I wish to have a chat with you over a bottle of your good Burgundy, which Captain Morte tells me, you keep for his especial use."

At the mention of the name of Captain Morte, the host of the Messmates' Anchorage turned pale; but he said quietly:

"Captain Morte, did you say, sir?"

"Yes."

"I have no friend of that name."

"Oh, yes you have, for I refer to the pirate of that name."

Captain Tom fairly shivered; but he felt that he must keep up a bold front, so he answered:

"Oh, yes, the pirate; I have heard of him, but never have seen him, though I'd take a day off to go to his hanging."

"Nonsense, man, you don't mean it."

"I do in faith."

"Then I shall tell Captain Morte what you think of him, for he believes you his friend and sent me to you," and the pirate lieutenant smiled wickedly.

"Blast your handsome face, what do you mean by scaring me to death just to have your own fun with me?"

"I've half a mind not to tap the Burgundy for you," growled Captain Tom.

"And to talk business with me in here, eh?"

"No, we'll take safer quarters in my fort," and Captain Tom led the way to his fort, as he called his private room.

"So the captain isn't dead then?" he said, eagerly.

"No, but he had a close call, and is now lying severely wounded."

"And who might you be?"

"My name is Duval, and I am first luff of the Witch."

"Ah! I have heard the captain speak of you; but you caught a Tartar in the Britisher!"

"We did indeed, and the captain was foolish to fight when he could run; but it is better as it is."

"Why so?"

"It gives that poor girl a respite whom the captain demanded should sacrifice herself."

"You are just my way of thinking there, lieutenant, for, though I like Master Rupert, and would do much for him, I don't like to see him persecute that poor girl, and I'd give much if he'd let up in that quarter."

"But he won't, you may rest assured, and he bade me come to see you, and tell you to keep an eye upon her, as he feared she might be influenced by her parents and friends to run off where he could not find her."

"Not she, if she gave her word, for it's in her to marry Satan himself if she made up her mind to it."

"So I believe; and the captain told me to tell you where we were now with the brig, and where we would put in at certain dates, so that you could have a messenger there to give him any information for his good, as to the movements of cruisers and merchant vessels, which would be for his advantage."

"I'll do that, but I won't help him harm that lovely girl, and you can tell him that the one man who is really his friend told you to say so to him."

"I will tell him, I assure you, and if he will give up his idea of dragging her down with him, I will be rejoiced; but from what I know of Captain Morte, I feel that it is vain to hope that he will do so."

"He'll never do it unless one thing prevents," firmly said Captain Tom.

"And what is that?"

"Death," was the ominous reply.

After posting Captain Tom thoroughly as to the future movements of the Winged Witch, Duval took his leave, and returning to his hotel remained in his room until the departure of the stage, which would take him by the coast road to a point where he could leave it and join his vessel.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TELL-TALE SEAL.

AFTER the departure of her strange visitor, Helen Hayward sat for some time in deep thought.

"And such a man a pirate?" she murmured.

"A man of noble face, and a face that somewhere I feel that I have seen before."

"It is strange, passing strange, that such as he can stoop to sea-robbing, and there must be a fearfully weak spot in his nature to allow him to become what he has, or some dire wrong have been done him to drive him to it."

"Just to think that Rupert Mortimer, a brilliant man, who could have made his mark in the world, and this man, should be what they are."

"But Rupert Mortimer has a wicked and cruel heart, which only needed circumstances to show what he was; but I am woefully mistaken if that man has not a good heart, in spite of his hands being dyed with blood."

As she thus mused her eyes fell upon a glittering object near the chair on which the pirate lieutenant had been seated.

Stooping she picked it up, and to her surprise she saw that it was a massive gold seal, with a crest of diamonds upon one side, set into the stone, and upon the other the initials "D. D."

Then upon the gold band that surrounded it was engraved:

"DUVAL DUNMORE OF CASTLE CRAGHEAD."

"How strange this is, for he alone could have dropped it."

"Yes, I remember now seeing his fob-chain, and the gold here has worn thin and broken."

"How can I give it to him, I wonder?"

"I must wait," and with this she placed it in her pocket and walking across the hall, tapped lightly at the door of the room occupied by Lord Stanwix.

His valet opened the door for him, and she asked if she should read to the wounded man.

"Oh, yes, and I am glad you have not waited until the afternoon, for I was getting lonesome, Miss Hayward," he said, pleasantly.

She advanced near the bed and asked:

"How are you feeling, Lord Stanwix?"

"Far better, I assure you."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Now what shall I read?"

"Talk to me instead."

"And what shall I talk about?" she said, with a smile which brightened up her face, now becoming so very sad in its expression.

"Talk to me about yourself."

"That will be of little interest."

"Ah, no, for the month is up, I know."

"Yes, and I have a respite," she said quickly.

"You have seen the pirate then?"

"No, but his representative."

"He feared to come then to claim you?"

"Oh, no, for that man does not know fear."

"Your words tell me that he lives, when I hoped that I had killed him."

"And you nearly did so, for he lies on board his vessel dangerously wounded."

"Please tell me of him."

Helen told of the visit she had received, and that she felt happy at the respite.

"You shall never marry him, Miss Hayward, for I will be able in a few weeks to go on board my vessel, and in the mean time, I will add to my crew, and place a heavier battery upon the brig, so that when next I meet the pirate he shall not escape me."

"Sh! you must not fret yourself, my lord, or talk of fighting, or the doctor will forbid my seeing you, as I am the only one to disturb you with my chattering."

"I would rebel at once and refuse to follow the doctor's advice under such circumstances, Miss Hayward."

Helen smiled and asked quickly, as though to change the subject:

"Is Dunmore a prominent name in England, Lord Stanwix?"

He cast a quick look into her face and said:

"We so consider it, Miss Hayward."

"Do you know of Castle Craghead in England, may I ask?"

Again he looked at her in that strange way, and answered:

"Oh yes, I know of Castle Craghead."

"Again let me ask you if you ever heard the name of Duval Dunmore?"

"What! Duval Dunmore?" he cried, excitedly.

"Yes, sir."

"It was the name of my poor brother, Miss Hayward."

"Your brother?"

"Yes, and I would beg of you now to tell me where you heard of his name, or if you know aught about him?"

Helen looked disturbed, and for a moment was silent.

Then she said in a low tone:

"What was your brother's full name, Lord Stanwix?"

"Duval Dunmore, Lord of Castle Craghead, were his name and title, and the latter is my title if my brother is dead."

"And you believe him dead, Lord Stanwix?"

"Miss Hayward, I have ever had a presentiment that my brother yet lived, though all others believe him to be dead."

"In fact, what seemed to be proof positive of his death was brought to England, and I was urged to take possession of the estates and assume my title."

"This I refused to do, though all of my friends and acquaintances at once began to call me Lord Stanwix, and I was forced to accept it through courtesy."

"But, not to take possession of Castle Craghead, until assured of Duval's death, I sought the roving commission on a cruiser which I now have."

"Will you now tell me how you ever heard of the name of Duval Dunmore, and if he yet lives to your knowledge, or whether you know aught regarding him?" and Lord Stanwix looked eagerly into the face of Helen, who said, after an instant of silence:

"I will tell you all that I know, Lord Stanwix, and I know that it will give you pain, for in my mind now there is no doubt but that your brother lives."

"Here, sir, have you ever seen this before?"

As she spoke she handed him the trinket she had found.

One glance at it and he exclaimed:

"Have I ever seen it before?"

"Why, Miss Hayward, I gave this seal to my brother, as a souvenir, ten years ago."

"Pray tell me how you came in possession of it?"

"It was dropped on the floor in the library an hour ago, by the messenger sent from Captain Morte, the pirate," was the low reply of Helen Hayward.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LORD STANWIX TELLS A STORY OF THE PAST.

"THIS was dropped in the library, by the man who brought you word from Morte, the

pirate?" asked Lord Stanwix, in a low tone, and Helen saw that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, you can see where the gold has worn very thin and it was broken by some slight movement of the wearer."

"It is my brother's seal, Miss Hayward."

"I do not doubt that, sir."

"And this wearer?"

"Must be your brother, Lord Stanwix."

"No, no, it cannot be that poor Duval has become such as that."

"In my mind, sir, there is no doubt but that the man who called upon me, giving his name as Lieutenant Dunmore, and your brother are the same, sir."

"Will you describe the man, if you please?"

"A man of fine form, dignified mien, and a face strangely like your own, while he is also an Englishman."

"Good God! can it be that it is Duval, and that my presentiment is to be fully realized?" said Lord Stanwix.

"I fear, sir, that you will find in the pirate lieutenant none other than your brother; but, from what I saw of him, he certainly has not the look of one who had yielded his life to crime."

"I cannot understand it, Miss Hayward; but tell me, where is this man?"

"He has left."

"But you can find him for me?"

"No, sir, only by communication with the pirate vessel."

"And that is impossible?"

"It is impossible until I again hear from the pirate chief."

"Too bad, too bad; but I will yet know all."

Then, after a moment of silence, he continued:

"Miss Hayward, let me tell you of this wandering brother of mine, if he is the one who has but now called upon you."

"He is three years my senior, and was from earliest boyhood a noble-hearted, generous fellow whom every one loved."

"He thought no more of his title than he did of plain mister, and was a rare sportsman, yachtsman, and had many friends among that class of people."

"My parents scolded him for being too democratic, but he only laughed at the idea of putting on the airs of an aristocrat."

"One day he came home and told father that he was in love."

"Our parents had selected a dozen fair maidens for him, any one of whom would have been a most eligible match, but he had refused to consider the selection of a wife until he met a girl who won his heart."

"That girl was a daughter of a poor country farmer, who had not money enough to give his child an education."

"But Duval had met her when she was a mere child, had gained the consent of her father to send her to boarding-school, and had educated her as a fine lady."

"She returned to her humble home a beautiful and accomplished maiden, and then it was that my brother told my parents that he was in love and who was the object of his adoration."

"The storm this raised was terrific, and my father forbade Duval ever speaking to the girl again."

"Poor fellow, he went off at once and married her, and they went to London to live."

"He found that my father was endeavoring to separate him from his wife, and he set sail for Paris."

"Disdaining to ask assistance from father, and unable to gain employment, Duval drifted along in the struggle of life until one day he came to his humble home and found his wife gone."

"A note to him explained all."

"She had been an ambitious, designing girl, and when she discovered that my father did not forgive his son, and that wealth and title did not come to her, but only hard work and poverty, she looked about for a new conquest; her beautiful face and form soon attracted attention, and she ran off with a young Italian noble."

"The shock to poor Duval was terrible, for he loved the false girl with all his heart."

"He broke down under the news, was thrown into brain fever, and his landlord, discovering who he really was, wrote to my father."

"My father's answer was curt in the ex-

treme, and was to the effect that the invalid was his son, and if he lived through the attack, when he, my father died, would be Lord of Craghead Castle; but that he had disgraced himself and his family, and would neither be aided nor owned by them."

"This letter the landlord showed my brother upon his recovery, and he left the place where he had suffered so much."

"It was months before we heard of him again, and then it came to us how an Italian noble, who had run off with the wife of an Englishman, had been tracked by the husband and forced to fight a duel, in which he had fallen."

"The servants of the Italian had then attacked the Englishman, the report said, who, in defending himself, had fired a shot which had killed his own wife, who was dashing up to the scene on horseback."

"Seeing that he would be murdered, my brother mounted the horse that his wife had just fallen from and fled."

"But he was hotly pursued and forced into a swollen stream, where both horse and rider were drowned."

"So said the report; but never from my mind could I efface the belief that poor Duval would one day reappear, and did he do so now, other than what he is, gladly would I welcome him and turn over to him the estates and title which are his just due, for I look upon his punishment of the Italian as just, and his defending his life against the servants as natural, while all united in telling me, for I went to the scene, that the shot that killed his false wife was an accidental one."

"Now, Miss Hayward, you know all, and should you again see my brother, or can get word to him in any way, I beg you to have him meet me, for tell him that I hold only love in my heart for him."

"Tell him that our mother, our father, are both dead, and dying forgave him for marrying against their will, and felt that he had suffered enough."

Helen felt deeply the story she had heard, and said in a low tone:

"Oh, that I could bring him face to face with you, and let him cast forever the dead past behind him."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ACCUSED OF TREACHERY.

By making his way to the fishing hamlet, where the smugglers had their rendezvous, Duval, the pirate lieutenant, was enabled to get a boat and run down to the secret inlet where he had left the brig.

He arrived in safety after an absence of several days, to find Captain Morte rapidly improving.

He was greeted in a cordial manner, and the pirate chief showed an anxiety to know the result of his officer's visit.

"Did you go there?" he eagerly asked, after the Spanish surgeon had left them together in the cabin.

"I did, sir."

"And saw her?"

"Yes."

"She has not broken her pledge then?"

"In what way?"

"By running off from me, or marrying another?"

"My opinion formed of Miss Hayward, Captain Morte, the short time that I had the pleasure of meeting her, was that she was a woman who would allow but one thing to prevent her keeping her pledge to you."

"And what is that one thing, sir?"

"Death."

"Ah! she might die, true, and that would break her pledge to me."

"And you might die, Captain Morte."

"True, I had not thought of that; but your opinion of her is as I think, for she is a noble girl, if she did cast me off when I was proven a murderer."

"As long as she heard my story only, she believed me; but when eye witnesses swore differently, then she cast me off and left me to my fate, for she knew that there was no doubt as to my guilt."

"Well, I yet hope to make her a good husband, so that she may forget my past."

Duval smiled grimly at this, and said:

"I told her of your wound, and that it would be months, perhaps, before you could be up."

"And her answer?"

"That she would wait."

"It is enough," said Captain Morte, while a triumphant gleam shot through his eyes.

"Did you see Captain Tom, also?"

"Oh, yes, and after giving him a good scare, enjoyed a bottle of his very excellent wine."

"I told you he kept the best; but you told him to put spies upon Miss Hayward, and to keep me informed of all that transpired?"

"I did, sir."

"Then your trip was a success?"

"I did as you told me, Captain Morte."

"Any news from that fellow, Riaz, who ran off with my lateen-rigged vessel?"

"Nothing could I learn about him."

"I wish to run across his path, and every man on his craft shall be put in the hold, and the vessel sent to the bottom with them for serving me the trick that they did," said Captain Morte, savagely, and Duval fairly shuddered at the fearful revenge which was contemplated upon Riaz, the rebel lieutenant, and his crew.

"There is one thing that I wish to ask of you, Captain Morte."

"Well, Duval, it is granted beforehand, for I owe much to you."

"Thank you, sir; I have tried to do my duty while with you, though I find I was not cut out for a pirate."

"Bah! you are not getting faint-hearted, and wish to leave?"

"I am not faint-hearted, sir; but I drifted into piracy as though it was my destiny."

"Circumstances, which I will not make known to you, took me from my home, and avenging a wrong made me a life-taker and a fugitive."

"I tried to live honest, became a captain of a merchant vessel, but it was taken by a pirate."

"I escaped, and began life again to be wrecked on an island, and after a year of suffering I was rescued by a pirate craft."

"I remained with my rescuer until I could leave him, and taking passage in a schooner across the Gulf it was captured by the very outlaw I had left."

"His first officer was killed, and he asked me to serve him until he visited Havana, and I could but obey."

"You remember that you attacked that pirate vessel, captured it, and offered me a position as your first luff?"

"Yes, for I was struck by your splendid use of weapons and cool courage."

"I accepted, and I have served you for quite a while now, but I desire to leave you."

"Not while I am down on my back, Duval, surely?"

"I will remain with you another week, sir."

"You cannot do better than remain."

"I may not do better as far as making gold is concerned, but I can certainly feel that what I earned has not cost human lives to get."

"Bah! you talk like a child, Duval; you are canting, and I am too ill to bear it, so leave me and send Lieutenant Buck here."

Duval bowed and left the cabin, and a moment after the pirate officer Buck entered.

He was an American evidently, but his face was evil in the extreme and treacherous.

"Buck, I wish to promote you to my first luff," said Captain Morte, abruptly.

"And Mr. Duval?"

"Has turned chicken-hearted, and, having been up to the town, and wishing to leave, I believe intends to betray me, so I will cut his days short."

"Do you mean to kill him, sir?" asked Buck, coolly.

"Yes; I wish you to go on deck, have a guard seize him, and swing him up to the yard-arm, without time for a prayer."

"But he is most popular with the men, sir, and—"

"Tell them that he has laid a plot to surrender us to an American cruiser, and that my orders are to hang him."

"Iron and gag him, so that he cannot talk, and while you are preparing for the work, order the anchor up and sail on the brig in great haste to bear out the story by at once putting to sea."

"Do you understand, Buck?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then obey," said Captain Morte, abruptly, and the pirate officer turned to leave the cabin to execute the chief's dastard orders.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A HOT CHASE.

WHEN Duval, the first officer of the Winged Witch, left the cabin, after telling Captain Morte that he wished to give up his position on board the vessel, there was something in the look that flashed suddenly into the pirate chief's face that caused him to feel that he was suspected of treachery.

For Captain Morte to suspect any one of being a foe to him was to sign a death-sentence upon that unfortunate one, Duval well knew, if it was in the power of the chief to carry it out.

Thus warned, he determined to know more, and having told officer Buck that his captain wished to see him in the cabin, he quickly sought his own snug quarters, and thrust into his bosom a leather case that he took from a secret hiding-place under the berth.

Then returning to the deck, he stepped to one side of the cabin companionway and listened.

Buck had just entered, so he heard Captain Morte promote him to first officer, and then what followed.

The boat in which he had come from the fishing-hamlet was alongside, and it was just dark, so that Duval knew that if he expected to escape the awful fate intended for him by his treacherous commander, he had no time to lose.

"Hold the deck, Lansing, until Mr. Buck's return, for I am going ashore," he said, with the utmost coolness, addressing an officer who was not then on duty.

"Ay, ay, Mr. Duval," answered the pirate, and passing on quickly to the gangway, Duval sprang over the side into the boat, seized the oars, and shot away from the brig.

He had not gotten out of sight when Buck came on deck and called out for him.

"He has just gone on shore, sir," said Lansing.

"Gone on shore? By whose orders?" yelled Buck, who was fearful that he was going to be cheated out of some cruel work, in which he always reveled.

"By his own orders, sir, I suppose," was Lansing's reply.

Buck darted back to the cabin and made known to Captain Morte that his intended victim had gone.

"Curse him! he overheard what was said."

"After him, Buck, and bring him back; but mind you, do not wound or kill him unless to prevent his escape."

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted Buck, and going on deck he yelled:

"Which way did that man go?"

"What man, sir?" coolly asked Lansing.

"Duval."

"Oh! he is just visible yonder, sir, going out of the inlet."

"Ho, men! clear away the third cutter and the dinghy, and get to your oars, for there is work before us."

"Yonder man has sold us out, so we must run him down."

The words of their officer startled the crew, and the boats were quickly lowered, and into the larger one sprang Buck.

Away they darted from the brig's side in hot chase of the boat ahead.

Duval could have landed, had he taken another course from the brig in starting out, and hidden in the woods; but he had wished to go by water, and hence pulled straight out of the inlet.

With a rocky shore upon either side, a strong tide running out, and a heavy sea, it was impossible to land once he had gotten into the inlet, so he had only to pull for it.

He was a superb oarsman, and knowing that he would be pursued, he bent to his blades with a will.

The skiff was a light one, and a small leg-of-mutton sail lay in the boat, so that as soon as he got out through the surf he stepped his mast and spread his canvas.

This carried him along as swiftly as he could row in that rough water, and he held hope that the pursuers could not make better speed.

Once out from the shadow of the wooded shores of the inlet, and the stars shone out bright enough for him to see the two boats coming in chase of him.

Straight out to sea he held his way, hoping that the boats would not dare to follow him very far.

But Buck was urging upon the oarsmen that if Duval escaped, he would bring down several cruisers upon them, as he had sold them to their foes, and the men strained every nerve to overtake the man who would betray them.

"They gain on me a little, and if they push on, and the wind does not increase, at the present rate of speed that we are both going, I will be overtaken in an hour's time," said Duval, with cool calculation.

Watching his little skiff closely, he held on, while his pursuers steadily gained on him.

As they drew nearer, seeing that they did not fire, he seemed to comprehend the reason, and said grimly:

"Captain Morte has given orders to take me alive, I see, and if they get me he will doubtless have me shot in his cabin, so that he will not miss the execution."

For some distance further he held on, and then said:

"Well, as they are within easy pistol-range, I will give them a hint that they are following a man who will not be quietly taken."

Drawing one of the two pistols from his belt, he took quick aim with one hand, while he held the tiller with the other, and the flash and report followed.

The oars stopped their steady swing in the leading boat, and the excitement showed that he had fired a death-shot.

Instantly he leveled at the next boat and drew trigger.

The same result followed; but only for a moment, and the two boats once more came on, seemingly more anxious to capture him than ever, while the heavy splashes in the water showed that he had done his work well.

"By Neptune! but the wind is failing me," he suddenly cried, as the breeze seemed to slacken up a little.

Hastily he sprang to the mast and laid it in the boat with its little sail, ready for use again, should the wind freshen, and springing to his oars again, sent his boat flying over the waters.

But the failing wind, and the time he lost in resuming his oars, had caused the two boats to gain rapidly, and it now became a desperate row for life for the brave man.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

DUVAL, the fugitive officer of the Winged Witch, realized fully the danger he was in, and that the boats' crews were determined he should be captured, even if they rowed out so far that it would take them the balance of the night to pull back.

Glancing at the land as he rowed seaward, Duval saw that it was two leagues away, too far for him to swim, with the tide against him, should he jump overboard and trust to hiding from his pursuers in the rough waters.

But it soon became very evident that he had to be captured and taken back to die, or take the chances of reaching the land.

One way it was certain death, and the other there was a ghost of a chance.

At any rate, it would be an easier death to die by sinking beneath the waters, than by the revengeful manner in which Captain Morte would seek to end his days.

In the boat he remembered that there was a long coil of small rope, and seizing this he bent over the stern, made one end fast to the iron staple in the rudder-post, and seizing the other he sprang into the sea while the boats were yet sixty feet distant.

A yell of rage broke from the crews of the boats as he disappeared from their sight, for they seemed to feel that he had chosen death by drowning rather than fall into their hands.

"Pull, men, pull hard, and we will pick him up before he drowns," yelled Buck, and the men bent with renewed energy to their oars, one going to starboard, the other to port of the floating skiff.

"Way 'nough!"

"Now let every eye search the waters for him," cried Buck, and eager eyes scanned the sea in all directions for the fugitive.

Rowing here, rowing there, pulling across each others' course again and again, going around and around the tossing skiff, and thrusting their oars upon either side of it, to see if he were clinging to it, the pirates certainly kept up a busy search for the hunted man.

Thus half an hour passed, one boat remaining near the skiff, while the other made circles about it, each circle becoming larger and larger.

"It is no use to look longer, for he meant to drown himself, and he has done it," cried Buck.

"Better tow his boat in with us," said the officer in the other boat.

"Yes, I will do that, and we can report him dead, for no mortal man could reach yonder land, as it is two leagues away, and with his clothes on he could not hold up a quarter of an hour.

"Give way, men, and we will return to the ship."

The painter of the skiff was made fast to the stern-cleets of the cutter, and the row began.

But the oarsmen were fagged by their long and desperate pull out, and their stroke was slow, and by no means strong.

The smaller boat certainly had the best of it, and the cutter's crew began to grumble at having to tow the skiff.

"It's but a light sea-skiff," said Buck.

"That may be, sir, but in this sea it pulls like a log," averred an oarsman.

"I wish to be able to tell the captain that we brought the traitor's boat back," said Buck.

But, cheer them as he might, the men grumbled more and more, and it was evident that they were making very little headway.

"The other boat shall have a trial at it," called out Buck, and the skiff was soon in its wake dragging hard upon the smaller crew.

"Let her go, for we will have all we can do without it."

The two crews broke forth in a cheer at this, and the boats passed on, leaving the skiff tossing about upon the waters.

Hardly had they grown dim in the distance when a dark object was visible slowly advancing toward the skiff.

Nearer and nearer it drew, until at last it reached the side, a hand grasped the gunwale, and Duval drew himself over with an effort and dropped into the bottom of the boat, while he gasped out:

"That was the hardest swim of my life, pulled down as I was by shoes and clothing."

"If it had not been for the rope I would have gone under sure."

After resting for some time he arose from his prostrate position and took a seat in the stern of the skiff.

"So they thought you towed hard, like a log on the waters, did they, old boat?"

"Well, I do not wonder at it, with a hundred and seventy five pounds of live man at the end of a rope astern."

"Well, I am out of that trouble, and supposed to be dead, too, so I will see what life holds in store for me from this day on."

As he spoke he put his little mast in position, hoisted sail to stand on up the coast, when suddenly he beheld a large vessel almost upon him.

"Boat ahoy!" cried a hoarse voice, and before he could answer came the command:

"As we luff up run alongside, for we want you."

"Great God! I seem doomed, for it is the old lateen-rigged Winged Witch, and Riaz is her commander," said Duval, as he moodily obeyed the stern summons.

CHAPTER XL.

A DUEL FOR RANK.

"SET your boat adrift, man, for we want you on board," was the order from the vessel's deck, as Duval ran under her lee.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the fugitive officer, determined to make the best of his unfortunate position, and obeying the order he went up over the side.

It was a bitter blow to him to be suddenly taken, when he held high hopes that all was brightening before him.

He had intended running to the seaport where his brother lay ill, and from there shape out his future destiny, and so shape it as to save Helen Hayward from Captain Morte.

This he had thought of as he rowed out ahead of his pursuers, and now he feared that all of his plans were to be frustrated.

As he reached the deck of the vessel which he knew so well, he recognized the man who had hailed him as the old boatswain under Captain Morte, and who had gone with the rebel Riaz.

Seeing him in uniform he knew that it must have been the hope or promise of promotion to an officer's rank that had made him go with the Spaniards.

"Ho, York, how are you?" he cried, as the boatswain met him at the gangway.

"Who are you that knows me? Why, you are—"

"Duval, and at your service, York."

"Lordy! it is you, lieutenant, and God forgive me the trick I helped to play on you; but I had to go with the majority, sir, and then Captain Riaz run me up the ladder a few rounds, for I'm third luff here now and acting second, for Lieutenant Rito got washed overboard in a storm some nights ago."

"But come back into the cabin and see Captain Riaz, and then you can tell us where you are from and where bound."

York then led Duval aft, and into the cabin.

"Why did you lay to, Senor York?" asked Riaz, the captain, as he saw his officer enter, and had not yet caught sight of Duval.

He was seated in his sumptuous cabin, a bottle of wine before him, and enjoying life as he most liked to do, by addling his brain with liquor.

"To pick up a passenger, Senor Captain, and one you have met before," answered York.

"Senor Duval, *por Dios!*" cried the Spaniard, springing to his feet as though he had been surprised by a vessel-load of enemies.

"Yes, Captain Riaz, I am Duval, your old messmate, whom you so cleverly stole this vessel from some time ago," answered the Englishman.

"And in the name of Satan, what do you here, and alone?"

"I have left the vessel of Captain Morte, and was going to seek another berth."

"Ha! is that so?"

"It is, Captain Riaz."

"Then what say you, Senor Duval, to a berth under me?"

"On this vessel?"

"Yes."

"With what rank, senor?"

"I'll make you first officer in the place of Vandura, and if he does not like it I'll send him to the fore-castle."

"I'll accept the berth, senor, though I do not wish to step into the Senor Vandura's shoes."

"Send him here, York, and we'll settle that question right off, and it will be sport for me to do so."

"You never liked Vandura, Senor Duval?"

"I confess, senor, that I did not."

"And he hated you so religiously that he wished to put a knife in you before we left that night, but I would not let him, and tried a drug instead to quiet you."

"It was very kind of you, senor," said Duval, with a sneer which the Spaniard did not detect.

"But why did you leave Morte, Senor Duval?"

"I got tired of serving a man who knew not a friend from a foe."

"That is true; Morte never knew what friendship was, and would have driven a knife in my back without compunction; but here come York and Vandura."

As Captain Riaz spoke the two men entered the cabin.

The man known as Vandura was a Cuban, and he had held a grudge against Duval ever since he had been thwarted by the Englishman in the commission of an act of cruelty one day to some of the crew.

He had a dark, evil face, and his temper was fiery and his disposition bad.

"Well, Vandura, here is an old friend who has boarded us to-night," said Captain Riaz.

Duval slightly bowed, and as his enemy saw who it was, he scowled and said:

"The Senor Duval is no friend of mine."

"Well, he is of mine, if I did play him a shabby trick one night in stealing this vessel; but he has forgiven me for that, I know, and, having left Captain Morte, I offer him a berth on this craft."

"I see no reason why the Senor Duval should not take Senor York's place as third officer, and the latter step into the position of second luff."

"No, Vandura, you know that the Senor Duval is a far better seaman than even I am, and he must not be put last upon the list, when he is superior to all."

"But you will not surely put him over Senor York?"

"Yes."

"And give him Rito's place?"

"No, you can take that."

"Captain Riaz, do you intend to place that man over me?" angrily said the irate officer.

"My dear Vandura, I want the Senor Duval for my first officer, and you hold that rank."

"I do, senor."

"Well, if you want it sufficient to fight for it, you can keep it, if you are the best man."

"You surely do not mean that I am to fight you, captain?"

"Oh, no; but you are to measure your strength, skill and courage with the Senor Duval, and may the best man hold the rank," was the rejoinder of Captain Riaz, who showed in his face the delight he felt at the prospect of trouble.

"I am at the Senor Duval's service," was the Spanish officer's remark, as he turned upon Duval, conscious in his power to hold his position, should they fight with swords, for he was a skilled man with that weapon.

"As Captain Riaz wishes me to hold a position which seems already filled, I shall not refuse to make it vacant so that I can step into it with better grace," was Duval's remark.

"That is square, and we can settle it in the morning," said York.

"The morrow is too far off, Senor York, and my creed is never wait until to-morrow to enjoy what can be enjoyed to-day."

"Then you mean for us to fight to-night?"

"Yes, Senor Vandura."

"Then I will get my sword and adjourn to the deck."

"No, you can have it out here, for I do not mind a little blood-letting upon the floor."

When Duval had sprung into the sea from his skiff, he had taken off his sword and left it in the boat, and when coming on board the vessel he had brought it with him, so that he simply said:

"I have my blade here, senor, and am ready now."

The Spanish lieutenant at once hastened away for his sword, while Captain Riaz said:

"Come, Senor Duval, fill up a glass of wine, for I notice that your clothes are all wet, and you need it."

Duval did as directed, and when Vandura returned, the two took positions opposite each other, while the captain and York stood upon one side, and a score of men crowded into the companionway.

"Now, gentlemen, I am ready for the sport to begin, and the slayer of the other holds the berth of first officer on board my vessel," called out Captain Riaz, with an expression upon his face that showed evident delight in the anticipated struggle, which he knew could end but one way.

Vandura had never seen Duval use a weapon in a single combat, and with perfect confidence in his own masterly handling of a sword, he stepped forward with a free and easy air, as though he felt confident of having all his own way.

But his blade was crossed by one whose strength did not break down under the pressure he brought against it, and his first thrust was met with a parry so skillful that it amazed him.

Surprised that he had found a foe worthy of his steel, the Spanish lieutenant warmed to his work and began to press the attack.

Duval was perfectly cool, and showed no anxiety upon his face as to the result, while Vandura was fretful and every action was quick and nervous.

"Don't get excited, Senor Vandura, because you did not shiver his blade or pierce his heart at the outset," cried Captain Riaz, almost wild with delight.

For some time Duval acted almost wholly upon the defensive, seemingly content with simply parrying the vicious thrusts of his adversary, which only irritated him the more and got Vandura into a frenzy of rage.

"You are too wild, Vandura," yelled the captain, as the Spaniard pushed his foe with lightning-like movements of his sword.

"*Por Dios!* I will have your life, dog," cried Vandura, savagely.

But, as he spoke, Duval suddenly changed from the defensive to the offensive, and began to force the fighting.

This was a fearful blow for the Spaniard, who believed that his adversary could only defend himself, and that in the end he could tire him out.

But now he was forced to act himself on the defensive, and the skill of the Englishman was such that he drove him across the cabin, and still holding him well, asked:

"Will the Senor Vandura yield his rank to me?"

"Never, dog of an Englishman!"

"Then I shall make the berth vacant and step into your shoes," was the quiet reply of Duval, and striking up the weapon of the Spaniard he thrust his own blade deep into his heart.

A wild curse broke from the Spaniard's lips, as he dropped dead upon the cabin floor, while Captain Riaz cried in a ringing voice:

"Bravo, Duval, you have won the berth, and are next to me in command of this vessel."

CHAPTER XLI.

OUT OF THE SEA DEPTHS.

WHEN Duval had discerned the nature of the vessel that had appeared so suddenly almost upon him, he had naturally supposed that his welcome on board would not be a very cordial one.

But York, as well as Riaz, had both admired the Englishman greatly, and would have been glad to have him join them in their separate cruise, only they knew his nature too well to make the proposition to him.

Once on board, and asserting that he had left Captain Morte, Captain Riaz was delighted at the chance of having him with him, and more so at the opportunity of seeing him assert his right to Vandura's place by defeating that officer in a duel.

"This is glorious! you are the best man with a blade that I ever saw, Senor Duval," cried Captain Riaz.

Then, as if feeling that something else devolved upon him, he continued:

"Senor York, serve out a double allowance of grog all around to the crew, in honor of this splendid work, and you then return and get a glass or two with me, when you can hold the deck while I have a social chat with my new officer."

"Lads, throw the body of Vandura overboard, but, mind you, first search him for any loose change or valuables he may have about him."

The search was promptly made, and then the body was tossed into the sea, while York, having had several bumpers in the cabin, and served out a liberal allowance of grog all around, took charge of the ship, leaving Duval below with the captain.

"Well, Duval, with you as my first luff, I have nothing to fear even up here in American waters, and we can rob ourselves rich in a year and retire to a sugar estate in Cuba and become planters, for I do not think this craft will last us longer than that time," said Captain Riaz, by way of opening the conversation between himself and his new officer.

"I think the Winged Witch is—"

"Pardon me, Senor Duval, she is no longer the Winged Witch, but the Flying Wizard, for so I have named her."

"The vessel certainly looks well, Senor Captain, and I observed that you had a large battery as I came on board."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes, senor."

"Well, when I ran off with the craft, I generously left you the guns."

"You certainly did, sir."

"I'll tell you a secret; but fill up your glass."

This Duval did without urging, for the wine was excellent, and then Captain Riaz went on:

"You see I had long wanted to be the commander of a good vessel; but happening to learn that there was a schooner going out of Boston at a certain date, with a cargo of arms for a Spanish coasting cruiser that was being built in the Carolinas, I determined, as Captain Morte had the brig, to steal this vessel."

"I set my men to working among the crew to sound them, and soon had all I wanted on my side."

"Running off with the craft, my next duty was to lay in wait for the schooner with arms and catch her."

"This I did, and from her cargo I got my guns, a full armament in small weapons, and all I needed to put my craft in perfect trim."

"I ran for a secluded spot on the coast and thoroughly overhauled and fitted up the craft, named her the Flying Wizard, and have had nothing but good fortune since I started out; a good fortune which was added to to-night by securing you as my friend and adviser."

"But your glass is empty."

Duval refilled it, and, while he sat musing, Captain Riaz, whose tongue was now running wild, said:

"By the way, senor, what caused Captain Morte to execute that poor fellow as he did?"

"Who do you mean, senor?"

"The one he made walk the plank."

"It has been such a habit of Captain Morte's to make unfortunate men walk the plank, that I fail to know which one in particular you mean."

"Did he capture a student while you were with him on the brig?"

"He did, or rather he picked him up at sea."

"That is the fellow."

"And how did you know that he made him walk the plank?" asked Duval, with surprise.

"From his own lips."

Duval was on his feet in an instant, and asked in a husky voice:

"What is that you say, senor?"

"That I heard from the young man himself how Captain Morte treated him."

"That is impossible, senor, for I saw that poor fellow walk boldly into the sea."

"So he did."

"And he was ironed about the wrists, and carried in his arms, attached to his manacles by a chain, a thirty-two solid shot to sink him."

"So he said."

"Said?"

"Yes."

"And you maintain that he is alive?"

"Of course he is."

"Where is he?"

"On this craft, but under the care of the surgeon, for he has been quite ill."

"How in the name of Heaven did he escape?"

"I will tell you, senor."

"And I shall be delighted to listen, captain."

"The young senor is a handsome fellow."

"He certainly is."

"Brave as a lion."

"I saw that when he died so bravely."

"He did not die."

"Well, when I thought that he did, senor captain."

"Ah! that is better."

"Well, he went over into the sea; but he is a very elegant form, senor."

"What has that to do with his not dying after walking the plank?"

"Much."

"I cannot see how?"

"Did you ever observe his hands and feet?"

"I never did."

"Well, they are remarkably small and shapely."

"Yes, senor."

"And when he sunk beneath the waves, he just slipped his small hands through the iron wristlets and was free."

"Free and leagues at sea?"

"Oh, yes, for he was a bold swimmer, kept afloat for a couple of hours, sighted us, hail-

ed us from the sea as coolly as though he stood upon the quarter-deck of a frigate, and we picked him up."

"This is remarkable, and I rejoice to hear it," said Duval, who knew the whole story of Captain Morte's persecution of the poor student, and how he had played a part to have Frank Shields hanged as the murderer of Louis Vale, and thereby get them both out of the way, and have no formidable rival between him and Helen Hayward.

"And this Mr. Shields is now on this vessel?"

"He is, and, as he says he is a pretty fair sailor, I have been anxious to keep him on board, and think of putting him in York's place, now that York has stepped up to second luff."

"It would be a good idea, sir, I think, if he would accept it."

"He must accept, or overboard he goes into the sea from which I took him," was the remark of Captain Riaz, who then added:

"I am full master here, to do as I please with life and limb, and I want no man on board, unless he will serve me, or is a prisoner who will bring good ransom."

"I shall give the fellow a chance, and if he is too honest to turn pirate, then his days are numbered."

"Now take the deck, senor, while I turn in," and Captain Riaz poured out another goblet of wine, dashed it off and rose to seek his state-room, but he was top heavy, reeled and fell, and as he began to snore as though comfortable, Duval left him lying where he had fallen and walked on deck, his brain full of conflicting emotions after all he had passed through.

CHAPTER XLII.

A CHANGE OF MASTERS.

CAPTAIN RIAZ was a human brute, if I can use such a paradox, and his men knew it.

When under the stern eye of Captain Morte he had been a good officer, but once with the reins in his own hands he knew no restraint and let his passions govern him.

Whatever the crimes and cruelties to others he committed, Captain Morte was ever kind to his own crew, though severe, for he knew how to manage them; but Riaz, the rebel pirate, was a man of a different kind, and determined to govern by brute force.

Already had he shot down two of his men upon his own deck for some trivial offense, and, severe as Vandura had been, the crew infinitely preferred him to their captain.

Under the influence of liquor Riaz would say and do things that he would forget when sober, and so it was with him the day following the picking up at sea of Duval.

He awoke from his drunken sleep on the floor in an angry mood.

His head was aching, his temper soured, and his first thought was of Frank Shields, who had been ill after his coming on board, having broken down under his long struggle in the water, and all that he had passed through.

"Is not that student able to come on deck and go to his duties as an officer, or is he studying for the priesthood and hopes to be Father Confessor to my crew?" he called out, when he came on deck.

When told that Frank Shields had already been on deck, he yelled out:

"Send him to me!"

The under-officer hastened to obey, when seeing York as officer of the deck, he shouted:

"Where is that new man Duval, that came on board and drank me drunk last night?"

"He should be attending to his duties."

"He has been on deck all night, senor, and left to get some rest only half an hour ago," said York.

"Oh, he has, has he?"

"Ah, there is the priestly student."

"Come aft, sir!"

Frank Shields, looking pale, thin, and haggard, walked aft, and bowed to the pirate captain.

"Do you intend to remain sick all the time, sir?" yelled Riaz.

"I do not, sir, but I have been quite ill," was the calm reply.

"And now?"

"I am well again, though not very strong."

"You must be strong enough to go to your duties."

"My duties?" asked Frank Shields, in surprise.

"Yes."

"What is there for me to do, sir?"

"You told me you was a sailor?"

"Yes, my boyhood home was on the sea, and I became an amateur sailor."

"Then you shall be my third lieutenant."

"Pardon me, sir, but while I am thankful to you for saving my life, I can never dishonor myself by serving under the flag that flaunts at your peak."

"Ha! what is the matter with the flag, sir, in the devil's name?"

"It is a pirate's flag."

"And I am a pirate, yes, a pirate captain, monarch of all I survey, and the one who can let you live or die as suits my humor."

"I am in your power, I know; but I would rather die than become a pirate," was the bold response.

"Then die you shall."

"Ho, York, rig a rope to the main-yard to string up this fellow with."

All on board had seen the humor of their chief and knew that a storm was brewing, and they regretted that it was to fall upon the poor student, at least all those who had any compassion in their hearts.

But they dared not say a word against it, knowing that the lightning of their captain's wrath would strike them as well.

York hesitated, glanced at the student, and then at the chief.

"Did you hear, sir?" yelled Riaz.

York dared not disobey, and he gave the order for the rope to be rigged for hanging the student.

It was soon done, and the seamen appointed to do the work were advancing toward Frank Shields, who stood in silence, perfectly calm, ready to meet his doom, as though Fate had wholly turned against him, when suddenly Duval stepped forward and said, in his quiet, but clear tones:

"Hold, lads, what does this mean?"

"It means, sir, that I have given orders to string that man up, for he refuses to join my crew, and if you interfere I shall have the fore-yard ornamented with you, as I half-believe you boarded this vessel to betray us to Captain Morte."

All stood aghast at this bold charge, and paused while Duval responded:

"Captain Riaz, you are drunk, and hence not accountable for your words or acts, so I will command this vessel until you become sober."

A murmur ran around among the crew at these bold words, and they pressed still closer to see the end.

As for York, he stood like a man in a trance, and Frank Shields gathered hope as he gazed upon the splendid-looking man who had so daringly stepped between him and death.

"You will command this vessel, will you?" shrieked Captain Riaz, and, drawing his sword, he rushed upon the Englishman, crying, as he did so:

"If you command this vessel, base mutineer, it will be after you have slain me."

"It will be then, Riaz," was the answer of Duval, as he whipped out his sword, and the two blades crossed.

A few passes, and Riaz, the rebel pirate, was run through the body by Duval, who, springing forward, seized his body ere it fell, and hurling it over the bulwarks into the sea turned quickly toward the astounded crew.

So sudden had been the fatal termination of this scene, that the pirates, daily used to deeds of crime and death, could not realize what had happened until the trumpet tones of the new lieutenant rung out:

"Lads ahoy! as your late chief has gone overboard I am captain of this vessel, and well for you is it, for I am here to save your necks from the gallows."

"Do I hear a voice against my being your leader?"

Not a sound came in response, and Duval continued:

"The fool who just ran upon his own death would have led your necks into the noose in a very short while, for the whole of

this coast now is alive with cruisers of all nations hunting from the seas this vessel and the brig commanded by Captain Morte.

"Escape for you will be impossible, except in one way, and that way I will show you if you will follow my lead."

"What say you, lads?"

Duval had spoken in Spanish, the tongue that most of the crew were more familiar with, and when he ceased speaking, a ringing cheer broke forth, while York shouted: "Captain Duval, I follow your lead to the death."

Duval's face flushed with triumph, and asking Frank Shields to act as an officer for the present, he showed his confidence in his crew by going into the cabin.

Soon after he returned to the deck and invited the officers of all grades, down to a coxswain, to come into the cabin and hold a consultation with him.

The result of that talk in the pirate's cabin was that the Flying Wizard was crowded with sail and headed landward as though bound upon a special mission.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

SOME weeks after the daring assumption of command over the Flying Wizard and her crew, by Duval, a small sloop stood out of the port, which has been the scene of many incidents in this story, and gaining an offing, headed down the coast.

There was nothing about the little vessel to indicate that she was not an ordinary coaster, though her sailing along like an arrow might have attracted a sailor's eye to her as a remarkably fleet craft for one of her build and rig.

Once his eye had been drawn to her he would observe that she was sharp as an arrow forward, had a good beam, and carried a very tall mast and long spars for a sloop of her tonnage.

With a breeze that was blowing six knots for any ordinary sailing vessel, she was getting ten out of it, and gliding along so quietly that one would not suspect her speed without watching her for some little time.

After she was well out of the harbor, a figure appeared upon her deck that is known to the reader, while the four men who comprised her crew were not.

The figure was Captain Tom of the Messmates' Anchorage, and it was evident that he was off on a voyage of importance, as it was a most uncommon thing for him to leave the shadow of his sheltering roof.

After running down the coast for some time, the little sloop put in toward the shore, and, under a skillful pilot, wound among the islands until she came to anchor in a small cove.

Here the boat was let fall from the davits, and while the pilot of the sloop took the oars, Captain Tom placed himself in the stern and was rowed further inland.

A pull of half an hour up a bay, or inlet, and the pilot ran into a basin where was visible at anchor the Winged Witch.

The coming of the boat seemed to be expected, and those in it recognized, for it was not hailed, but ran alongside.

"The captain will see you now, sir," said Buck, who was the officer in charge of the deck, and led the way into the cabin.

Captain Morte was recovering rapidly, that was certain, for he lay upon a lounge, and had gotten over the look of suffering he had worn for days after he was wounded.

He greeted Captain Tom with a smile and grasp of the hand, and said pleasantly:

"Be seated, Tom, and try that liquor and a cigar, on the table there."

"I am glad you came."

"It is risky for me to go out, captain, but I couldn't neglect you in your distress, and was only too glad to hear that you had not been killed."

"Came pretty near it, Tom, but am all right now, and old Sawbones says I can be out of here in a couple of weeks."

"That is good news; but you caught a tough one in that British officer."

"Indeed I did, and I hope to meet him again and pay him up for this."

"His brig was the Playful, I believe, and he is an English nobleman."

"Yes, that is it; but you had better let him alone, for he has gotten on board nine heavier guns, changed the rig of his vessel to

give her greater speed, and increased his crew to one hundred men, all being done just for you, and he will set sail just as soon as his surgeon says he is able to go on board his ship, which will be in about two weeks."

"Ah! I must avoid him, then, until I add to my crew and mount two heavy pivot-guns I have in view."

"As for the brig's going, she is fleet enough to show a clean pair of heels to anything; but when I am ready for the Englishman, he will find me; but you must get me about thirty good men."

"I'll try it, but the cruisers are as thick as thieves in these parts now, and the lads will be backward in shipping under the black flag."

"I must have them, so offer them what bounty you please."

"Now what about that rebel Riaz, who ran off with my old vessel?"

"Oh, he's heard from now and then, robbing everything he comes up with, from a fishing-smack to a packet."

"Just like him; but I'll end his career when I can lay my eyes upon him; but what about anything rich in the way of a merchantman about to sail or coming in?"

"Here is a list I got up for you of vessels worthy of your trouble to catch them," and Captain Tom handed the pirate chief a slip of paper.

"You are a treasure, Tom, and will not be forgotten in the division of booty."

"Now let me ask you if you have seen or heard aught of the Englishman who was my first luff, and whom I sent to see you?"

"No, I have not, and I hoped to see him aboard here, for he's a noble fellow, and I took a fancy to him."

"So did I; but he tried to sell me out, when he was up at your town, or at least I think he did, and—"

"Then he is not here?"

"No, he took to sea in an open boat to escape my polite attentions, and though he was hotly pressed he was not taken."

"However, he jumped into the sea, after he had killed two of my men, and the men say he was drowned."

"But he was a bold swimmer, and somehow I have an idea that he did no go under."

"How far was he from the land?"

"Something over two leagues, and the sea was running high."

"Guess he went down."

"Maybe; but keep your eyes open for him, and if he runs across your path put him in your secret chamber and starve him to death."

"I'll do it, for I hate a traitor, though I did not suspect it of him."

"Nor I; but if you want a cool thousand show me his body or bones when I next visit your town."

"Now about Helen?"

"She's there."

"What of her?"

"She's got awful sad-looking of late, and they say it is because she intends to sacrifice herself to you; but she seems prettier than ever."

"The English captain is at her home, you wrote me?"

"Yes, and is in love with her, I guess, and you'd better let him have her, for you'll only bring sorrow to her, captain."

"Don't talk that way, Tom, or you'll make me your foe," said Captain Morte, in angry tones.

"I don't wish that, captain, but I feel sorry for the girl."

"She shall be mine, and I wish you to arrange it for me."

"If you are set on it, I'll do what I can."

"I am set on it, and you must arrange to bring her to me one month from to-day."

"How can I?"

"Get a man you can trust to see her, or see her yourself in disguise."

"Give her this letter I have written, and let her leave her home on a certain night and you meet her."

"Have a coasting schooner, one that will not attract attention, anchored off her home and take her on board of it and bring her here."

"Do this for me, and I have five thousand dollars to place in your hand."

"I'll do it, captain, but must I bring the schooner here?"

"Yes, you can load the craft with a cargo of some kind, to avoid suspicion, and you can have the thirty men you ship for me on board in the hold."

"I'll be on the alert, captain, and do as you wish."

"Now, as there is nothing more to talk over, I'll get back for I am always nervous away from home," and a few moments after Captain Tom was on his way back to his home, to carry out his schemes of devilry concocted with the Sea Desperado.

How his plottings terminated, and what came of all the fiendish schemes of Rupert Mortimer, the Desperado of the Ocean, will soon be fully developed.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DEATH-CHAMBER.

A MAN sat in the tap-room of the Messmates' Anchorage one evening some time after the visit of Captain Tom to the Captain of the Winged Witch.

He was a man of superb stature, which was set off by the sailor suit he wore, and his face was one to attract attention anywhere, for it was beardless, and every feature was plainly marked.

He had ordered a glass of grog, such as was drank by the sailors who frequented the tap-room of the Messmates' Anchorage, but he had not touched his lips to the vile liquor, though he had pretended to do so.

Captain Tom had noticed him when he came in, and his small eyes had twitched viciously as though he recognized the seaman.

After awhile he went over to the table by the stranger and said:

"You haven't tasted your rum, shipmate."

"No, somehow I don't feel like drinking."

"It isn't as good as the bottle we had together, when last we met in my den."

The stranger slightly started, but said with a smile:

"I see that you recognize me."

"I do, although as you have cut off your beard your looks are changed; but come into my room and tell me about the captain."

"You have not seen him then since I was here?"

"No, indeed; has he been to the city?"

"He left the vessel for a day or so, but I did not know where he went."

"He did not come here; but when did you leave the ship?"

"I left my vessel two days ago."

"And didn't the captain send me any word?"

"Oh, yes; but I did not wish to be noticed going into your room with you by those present."

"I'll arrange that, sir, very soon. Just wait here and when you see me nod my head, get up and go into yonder door."

Captain Tom then left the tap-room, and soon the sailor got the nod and walked into the room.

The landlord followed him and said:

"Take that chair, sir, for you will find it comfortable."

"But I deprive you."

"Oh, not in the least."

"Just throw yourself back in it and see how comfortable it is."

The seaman did as he was told, and, with a sudden click the arms of the chair flew up and he found himself in an embrace which he could not shake off.

"I've got you, Lieutenant Duval, the traitor," chuckled Captain Tom.

Duval saw that he was entrapped, but took it coolly.

He was a man of great physical power, but could not move in the chair, and Captain Tom took a rope and came toward him.

"What does this mean, sir?" demanded the officer, sternly.

"It means, sir, that I have seen Captain Morte."

"Well?"

"And he told me that you returned to his vessel, having made arrangements while here to sell him out."

"He lies, for I would not have been treacherous to him while an officer upon this vessel; but now it is different."

"Yes, it is so different that you will never harm mortal man again."

"What do your words mean?"

"That he who sits in that chair leaves hope behind."

"You dare not murder me."

"Oh, no, I will let you kill yourself."

"Come, I'll take your weapons and then tie you."

Having disarmed his prisoner, Captain Tom bound him securely, gagged him with a bandage about his mouth, and then said:

"Will you go quietly with me, or shall I send for my aid and drag you?"

"Where do you take me?"

"To a secret chamber I have in the house."

"I will go."

Duval was then led by Captain Tom out of the room, up a secret flight of stairs, the door opening to them having been opened by a spring.

Up, up, they went, until at last a ceiling was above their heads.

"Folks might think that this leads to the garret, but it don't."

"Where does it lead?"

"To my secret chamber."

Touching a spring, Captain Tom raised the heavy trap overhead, and led his victim into a room some twelve feet square.

In spite of his nerve, Duval started at what he beheld there, for two skeletons lay upon the floor in one corner.

The ceiling of the room was some fifteen feet in height, the walls were of brick, the floor of solid masonry, excepting the trap, which was iron, and there was no window or door in it, which gave it the appearance of a shaft, or well.

Overhead was a skylight of four small panes of glass that gave light, and this being raised a few inches, and open in the sides, furnished the only air for a prisoner to breathe.

The place was sickening to Duval, as he was pushed across the room, while Captain Tom sprang back to the trap, which he nearly closed after him.

"You are to die here, lieutenant, and when you are dead I will bring Captain Morte to see you."

"I must leave you now alone with those two piles of bones, that were once flesh and blood like you; but they were suspected of treachery, and there they are."

"You can yell for aid if you wish to, but your voice only goes upward through that breathing space, and no one will hear you."

"Now, farewell."

Without another word Captain Tom departed, and Duval was left alone in the death chamber of the Messmates' Anchorage.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHAT AN ENEMY OVERHEARD.

DUVAL was no man to despair, and yet it did seem as though no possible act of his own could save him from death there in that hideous room.

His first thought was to free himself from his bonds, and he set about it with a will.

Perhaps it was that the secret chair had prevented Captain Tom from doing the work well, or it may be that he did not care whether the bonds were very secure or not, relying as he did wholly upon the secret chamber to hold any one that he chose to put in it; but, whatever it was, Duval certainly freed his arms with remarkable celerity from the ropes wrapped around and around his body, pinioning them to his sides, and then extending to his feet, hopping them so that rapid movement was impossible.

Once free of the ropes, Duval set about studying the position.

Not a bed, chair, or object of any kind did the room contain other than the two skeleton forms.

To scale the walls was impossible he knew.

But suddenly his face lighted up, as his eyes were fixed upon the skylight.

Then they fell upon the bones, and it was but the work of an instant for him to tie the skull of one of the victims to the end of the rope.

Tossing it up into the air, he sent it shivering through one of the panes of glass, and it fell beyond upon the roof.

Pulling upon it, it came back into the room and was caught in his hand.

Again it was thrown, and more skillfully, for it came back through another pane of glass and hung swinging within reach of his

hand, the rope having caught over the iron frame that held the glass as he intended it should.

Drawing upon the rope he found it firm and that it would hold his weight.

Hand over hand he went up to the skylight, and discovered that, by clinging with one hand to the edge, he could raise the iron frame off with the other, and thus gain access to the roof.

Glancing out, he saw only the roofs of houses below him.

But he marked his distance, took notes that would serve him when darkness came, and then returned to the floor, standing by the trap with the intention of killing Captain Tom, should the notion enter the head of that worthy to return.

But darkness came at last to the watching man, and Captain Tom, wisely for himself, did not put in an appearance.

"What possessed the fellow not to rob me, I cannot tell; but it left me in luck," muttered Duval, as he made his arrangements to leave his hateful prison.

Up the rope he went, as soon as it was dark, and removing the iron frame, slipped out upon the roof.

His rope then aided him to descend to the roof of a wing of the house, and drawing it after him, he fastened it to a chimney and went hand over hand into a back yard.

To one side of him was a window, and he heard voices within, so stepped cautiously forward and glanced inside.

To his surprise he beheld Captain Tom and one other.

The night was warm and the window was open a few inches, and he leaned down to listen to what was being said.

The yard was small, a high fence was about it, and only the window and door leading from Captain Tom's den led into it, so that the landlord of the Messmates' Anchorage little dreamed of being overheard in what he said.

"If I pay you well you'll undertake the job?" Duval heard Captain Tom ask.

"Tell me of the work I have to do," was the response of the stranger, who was in citizen's dress and had the look of a villain.

"I'll not tell you unless you agree to do it."

"What will you pay?"

"One thousand dollars."

"How long will it take me?"

"Perhaps a week."

"And you'll pay expenses besides my thousand?"

"Yes."

"Any killing to be done?"

"No."

"I'll do it."

"Enough, now to tell you what it is."

"I am ready to hear."

"You know the Hayward mansion?"

"I do."

"And Miss Helen Hayward?"

"I have seen her."

"Well, you are to see her, give her this letter, have her pledge herself to meet you at a certain time and place that I will make known to you, and I will have a vessel awaiting you."

"That is not hard to do."

"No, you will earn your money easily."

"Where am I to take her?"

"To Captain Morte, of the Winged Witch."

"Ah! I heard that she had pledged herself to marry the Sea Desperado; she offered herself as a sacrifice for a craft and crew, they say."

"Yes, so they say, but the sacrifice was not great, as the girl loves Captain Morte and wishes to marry him, and only puts on airs when she pretends that she does not."

"Ah, that's it, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll see her and give her the letter."

"Now give me one hundred as a bonus."

The money was counted out by Captain Tom, who then closed his window and the two left the den, little dreaming that an eavesdropper had heard their precious plot against Helen Hayward.

CHAPTER XLVI.

DUVAL'S PLOT.

WHEN Duval, the outlaw captain of the Flying Wizard, left the little yard by scaling the fence, he found himself in a back alley

that was dark and deserted, being evidently little used.

He was most anxious to escape observation, knowing that if recognized by Captain Tom, it would bring on a climax that would thwart a plot he had already formed in his mind for the rescue of Helen Hayward from the snare she was in.

Accident had placed him in possession of the plan of Captain Morte, through his ally, the innkeeper, to get possession of Helen, and he determined to act upon it.

After taking possession of the pirate vessel as he had, he had run her to a secluded inlet on the coast, and then brought her to anchor where she would be out of the way of all prying eyes.

For the sake of discovering what he could to serve him, he had gone to the town, and now, forearmed as he was by being forewarned, he determined to at once return to his vessel.

Seeking a sailors' inn upon the shore he there called to two of his men, who had accompanied him, and going to the harbor they set sail in a small boat for the rendezvous of their vessel.

Frank Shields met him at the gangway, an eager, anxious look upon his face.

"What news, Captain Duval?" he asked, quickly.

"Come into the cabin with me, Mr. Shields, and I will tell you all."

"You are back so soon I fear the worst."

"No, I am back so soon because I have good news, or at least think so; but let me tell you just what has happened."

"You will find a willing listener, I assure you."

"Well, Mr. Shields, I went to the town and put my men at a tavern, after which I cut off my beard, disguising myself as you see."

"I was, however, recognized by that keen-eyed villain, Captain Tom, and with a result that well-nigh proved fatal."

Duval then told the story of his capture, escape, and what followed.

"Now you see," he continued:

"I heard their plot to see Miss Hayward, and get possession of her, and I shall forestall them, sir, though to do so I had to return to the vessel first to get your aid."

"Indeed you shall have it."

"I know that, and I desire you to take command of the schooner, while York, with a dozen picked men, returns with me to the town, where I shall charter a small schooner and place them on board."

"I will then see Miss Hayward myself, ask her to aid us, and will inform you on what night I run out, and have you meet us at sea with this vessel, when we can get what men we may need for the undertaking."

"Now, as soon as I have had some rest, I will return to the town, arriving at night with my men, and York will go with me, so that you will be in full charge."

Frank Shields fully coincided with Duval in the plot to save Helen, and late that night the latter left the Flying Wizard with York and half a dozen men.

Arriving in port about dawn, they put up at a sailors' inn; but Duval at once went in search of a suitable vessel, and finding one, chartered her for a few weeks and put his men on board.

His next duty was to seek an interview with Helen, and just at sunset he wended his way toward the Hayward mansion.

As good luck would have it, Helen was leaning over the garden gate as he approached, gazing sadly out over the waters.

Her thoughts were bitter indeed, for she was musing half-aloud about the misery that was in store for her.

"Ah me!" she murmured.

"I must soon reach the end, and be struggling irresistibly in the breakers into which Destiny is driving me."

"I made the sacrifice of myself to save those with me, and I will keep my pledge and become the wife of Rupert Mortimer, alias Captain Morte, the Sea Desperado."

"Oh, to think that I once loved that man, once promised to become his wife, believing him all in the world to me."

"I was a child then, though if he had proven himself all that I could have wished, I would have still loved him, for he was different then, or at least I thought so."

"But I verily believe the man's vanity is such that he thinks I still love him."

"He shall see!"

"Ah, all those who wonder why I so tamely submit, why I insist on keeping my pledge to a pirate, will see why I do so."

"They will then know that I have a revengeful heart against the one who put to death Frank Shields."

"They will know that I keep my pledge, become the bride of a buccaneer one minute, to drive a knife into his heart the next, and thus avenge the death of Frank Shields, and rid the seas of such a monster."

"What will become of me then, God only knows; but I shall not waver."

"Ah! there comes a seaman and I will depart, for I like not to face any one now with these thoughts in my breast."

As she spoke she turned to depart, when Duval called out:

"Stay, lady, and let me speak with you, pray!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE INTERVIEW.

THERE was something in the voice of the man, as he called to Helen, that checked her in her departure, and caused her to turn and ask:

"Well, sir, what do you wish of me?"

"You are Miss Hayward?" and Duval halted at the gate.

"I am."

"Miss Hayward, we have met before."

"Your voice, sir, and your manner seem familiar, but I cannot remember where we have met."

"I am one, Miss Hayward, who told you when visiting you some time ago, that your noble self-sacrifice must never be made."

"Ah! you are—" and Helen paused, gazing with deep interest upon the man that she knew could be none other than the brother of Lord Stanwix.

"I am the one who called upon you, Miss Hayward, as Dunmore the pirate lieutenant, and I now have come to see you again, but not this time am I the messenger of the Sea Desperado."

Helen had now returned to the gate, and stood gazing at the man, who was standing on the outside, gracefully leaning upon the railing.

"You mean that you are not then a pirate now?" asked Helen.

"I mean, Miss Hayward, that I was suspected of treachery by Captain Morte, though guiltless of being a traitor even to him, I assure you."

"Learning that he intended to put me to death, I made my escape, and was picked up at sea by a vessel which Captain Morte formerly commanded, but which had been stolen from him by a former lieutenant, a monster by the name of Riaz."

"Circumstances, which I need not explain, placed me in charge of that vessel and put Riaz to death, and the craft, now known as the Flying Wizard, is lying concealed only a few leagues from this port, while I have come hither to see you."

"To see me, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Hayward, and to ask you to go with me on a certain specified night, and see me save you from Morte, the Desperado."

"Ah, sir, I fear that cannot be," sadly said Helen.

"It can be, and will be; while I could act without your aid, but desire to have you with me for a particular purpose, if you are willing to trust me."

"I certainly am, sir, for something tells me to do so; but may I ask how you intend to save me from this Sea Desperado?"

"I cannot explain all now, Miss Hayward, only have hope that all will come well in the end, and do what you can to aid me."

"I will do all that I can; but should Captain Morte, as men call him, send for me to keep my pledge, I must go."

"Well, he will send for you, I know, and that very soon, for a man has already received his orders to visit you and arrange an hour when you shall go with him."

"Ah! I feared that it must come."

"Do not lose hope, Miss Hayward, even if you go with the messenger of Morte, the pirate, for I pledge you my word I will save you from him."

"Heaven grant it, for if you save me from him, you save me from committing a fearful crime," and Helen shuddered, remembering her determination to end the life of Rupert Mortimer with her own hand.

"Then, Miss Hayward, rely upon me, and when I have perfected my plans, I must beg to see you again."

"In the mean time you will be visited by a messenger from Captain Morte, and I beg that you enter into his plans, even to the carrying of them out, should I not see you once more before the time for me to act."

"But go without dread, for a friend your little dream of will be at hand to save you."

"And who is this friend?"

"That I cannot tell you; but now I will say farewell until we meet again," and the strange man walked away, in the gathering gloom, leaving Helen deeply moved by what had passed between them.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PIRATE'S ENVOY.

THE day after her meeting with Duval at the gate overlooking the sea, Helen Hayward was seated in her room alone, when her maid entered and told her that there was a man in the arbor waiting to see her.

Helen gave a sigh, asked no questions, but, determined to drift with the tide, she left the house and walked toward the little arbor, hoping to see Duval, yet dreading to see the one whom she expected from Morte, the Sea Desperado.

She found a man quietly awaiting her in the sea-arbor.

It was the same individual whom Duval had seen in close conversation with Captain Tom the night of his lucky escape from the death-chamber.

He was dressed with evident care, though his style was of the fashionable flash kind, and his face was sinister and villainous.

He arose with assumed politeness, upon seeing Helen, and doffing his hat, said in pompous tones:

"Miss Hayward, I have pleasure in meeting you."

Helen bowed coldly, and answered with frigid manner:

"Explain your business with me at once, sir."

"I am an envoy, Miss Hayward, from a distinguished individual."

"By what right do you call on me, sir?"

"You shall know, miss, for I come from one you greatly care for."

"Sir, at once state why you are here, or I shall leave you."

The man saw that he did not impress Helen with his assumed importance, and he said, bluntly:

"Your lover sent me."

"Sir, what do you mean?"

"I come from the pirate captain, Morte."

"And for what purpose?"

"First, to hand you a letter written you by Captain Morte, and second, to arrange with you a time for your departure to join him."

"Hand me the letter."

The imperious manner of Helen completely awed the envoy of the pirate chief, and he promptly handed forth his letter.

It was sealed, and addressed to:

"MISS HELEN HAYWARD,

Hayward Mansion.

Per Envoy."

Breaking the seal Helen read aloud, as though unmindful of, or uncaring for, the presence of the man who called himself an envoy.

The letter was as follows:

"ON BOARD WINGED WITCH.
"MY DEAR HELEN:—I write you from a bed of suffering, for, as you know, I was seriously wounded in my engagement with the British brig Playful, but have satisfaction in knowing that her titled commander also well-nigh met his death; but I hope to meet him again, and render a better account to the world of the deeds of the Winged Witch."

"My wound having prevented me from keeping my compact with you, I now send an envoy to you to arrange a meeting, when the one wish of my life will be carried out, and you will become my bride."

"The messenger who hands you this trust implicitly, and arrange with him when you will come to me."

"He will plan all, and you will have but to follow his advice."

"Once you are my wife, and I will give up the life I now lead and live to make you happy."

"More I cannot promise, but my actions shall prove my sincerity."

"Farewell, until we meet on the day that makes me a happy man in spite of the name I bear."

"Yours ever,

RUPERT."

"Well, sir, what is your plan?" asked Helen, when she had read the letter.

"You will go, then?"

"Certainly, for I shall keep my pledge made to the Sea Desperado."

"Then, Miss Hayward, I have but to tell you that all arrangements are being made, and when completed I will instruct you.

"Hearing from me the night of our departure, you have but to meet me here at the hour which I will specify, and the day following will find you in the presence of Captain Morte."

"I shall be ready, sir, and if you desire to communicate with me leave a note here, just in this nook, for me, for I shall come here morning and evening," and Helen pointed out a niche in the arbor that was a safe hiding-place for a letter.

"I will do so, Miss Hayward, communicating with you either at sunrise or sunset."

Helen simply bowed, and, turning, walked away, while the pirate's envoy stood gazing after her and muttering:

"A beauty, sure; but as haughty as a queen, and she spoke to me as though she had an utter contempt for me."

CHAPTER XLIX.

HELEN'S SECOND GREAT SACRIFICE.

DAYS passed after the interview between Helen Hayward and the pirate's envoy, and hearing no word from him, she became nervous and anxious with dread.

But at last one evening a letter was found in the arbor in the secret hiding-place.

It read simply:

"MISS HAYWARD:—

"To-morrow night I shall call for you, so be good enough to meet me at the arbor by ten o'clock, ready to accompany me. THE PIRATE'S ENVOY."

True to her promise, Helen Hayward was at the rendezvous.

She had secretly made her preparations, and left her home, bidding farewell to no one.

From Duval she had not heard, and she had given up hope, and resolved to carry out her former purpose, terrible as was the thought to her.

Passing to and fro, as the minutes wore on, she waited the coming of the envoy as a doomed man might wait the summons to execution.

The night was dark and a fresh breeze was blowing, which, rippling the waters of the harbor, caused the numerous vessels at anchor there to rise and fall upon the tiny waves, and make their lights dance merrily.

After a long time watching and waiting in the gloom a man was seen advancing along the hill pathway.

As he drew near the gate he paused and gave a low whistle.

Instantly Helen, stepping forward, said firmly:

"I am here."

"You are prompt, miss."

"It is best to have the agony over, so lead on."

"You see that twinkling light on the water, miss?"

"Yes."

"That is the schooner"

"Well, I am ready."

"Have you no baggage?"

"Only this carpet-bag."

"I will carry it for you; but I thought brides always had plenty of baggage, and I expected to have to send half a dozen men after yours," the man said, rudely.

"A woman flying from her home in the dead of night, can carry but little with her."

"True, miss, and I guess the captain can fit you out from the fine clothes he has gotten in his sea robberies."

"Silence, sir."

The girl spoke sternly and the man said no more, but taking up her carpet-sack led the way down the path to the shore.

There a boat awaited them with two oarsmen, and a man was standing near on the bank.

"Is that you, Captain Tom?" called out Gringo, the escort of Helen.

"No: Captain Tom's on board, and sent me after you," answered the man.

"All right, here is the lady, and I guess my work's done, so I'll go; but tell Captain Tom I will see him on his return."

"He told me to tell you to come on board now and get the balance of your money."

"I'll do it."

Helen refused his aid and stepped into the boat, which at once started for a schooner lying a few cable-lengths distant.

Running to the gangway, Helen was aided upon the schooner's deck, by a man who said politely:

"This way, miss," and he led the way toward the cabin.

"Here, my man, are you Gringo?" called out the person with Helen.

"That is the name I hail to."

"Then come into the cabin, for Captain Tom wishes to see you."

"Good!" and the three descended the companionway into the cabin, Helen going first, Gringo next and the seaman behind.

As Gringo's foot touched the floor, he was seized on either side by stout arms, and in an instant almost he was gagged and bound.

Then to his horror he saw Captain Tom in the same luckless condition, while he heard a stern voice say:

"Now we will get under way to take Captain Morte his bride."

"Miss Hayward, pray be seated, and I will see you after awhile."

Helen sunk into a chair, while the speaker, who was none other than Duval, went on deck.

As he left the cabin he gave orders to his men to get up the anchor and set sail, and in a short while the schooner, an ordinary coasting-vessel, was standing seaward.

Out of the harbor she went, then along the coast, and guided by an experienced pilot ran into the little basin where the Winged Witch was lying when visited by Captain Tom.

And there the buccaneer brig lay at anchor, while from her deck came the ringing hail:

"Ahoy! what schooner is that?"

"The Buccaneer's Bride," answered Duval, giving the signal agreed upon.

"Ay, ay; come alongside."

"That was Morte's voice," said Duval, to the one who stood by his side.

"Yes; but I will to my post and be ready," was the answer.

The next moment the schooner glided alongside of the Winged Witch, and as the lashings were thrown the air seemed to be suddenly filled with flying forms, and four-score men suddenly sprung upon the deck of the pirate.

Almost instantly the deck was swept of the pirates, Captain Morte was a prisoner, and the outlaws rushing up from below were cut down or shot without mercy.

"The brig is ours!" cried a trumpet voice.

"And who are you?" asked Captain Morte, savagely.

"I am the man, sir, that has brought you your bride."

"I am Duval Dunmore, your ex-luff, and here, sir, is a gentleman I would like to introduce to you as one from the grave."

"Mr. Frank Shields, this is Captain Morte, the Sea Desperado, Ocean Monster, or whatever else you wish to call him."

"A cry broke from the lips of Rupert Mortimer at beholding step before him one whom he believed he had sent to the bottom of the sea; but Duval gave him no time for thought, but called out:

"Miss Hayward, will you come here, please?"

Rupert Mortimer saw glide toward him the form of Helen Hayward and groaned:

"Woman, you have done this, and may my blood be upon your head."

"It would have been, Rupert Mortimer, if I had been allowed to sacrifice myself as I intended, by becoming your wife, for it was my intention to kill you as soon as the bonds were over, and thus rid the world of a sea monster," was the stern, ringing reply of Helen Hayward.

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

BACK to the little haven, from which she had been cut out by Captain Morte, sailed the Winged Witch, and in her wake came the lateen-rigged vessel, Flying Wizard, the coasting schooner that had served so well to do her allotted task.

Into the jail, from whence he had escaped to become a pirate, went Rupert Mortimer, alias Captain Morte, Tom and Gringo, the

jailer putting them together upon the principle that "misery loves company."

In other cells the pirates were placed, and justice overtook one and all of them very swiftly, Rupert Mortimer dying a hardened sinner, hanged in the midst of those of his crew who had been sentenced to death along with Captain Tom and Gringo.

When the execution was over the people of the town breathed more freely, and all united in trying to make Frank Shields forget how he had been condemned to die for a crime of which he was innocent, while Mr. Hayward and his wife, heartily ashamed of themselves, made him their guest, and promised him their daughter, when they felt confident that Captain Stanwix Sedgemoor was going to marry pretty Lucy Sanford.

As for Duval Dunmore he became a hero, second only to Frank Shields, and went on board his brother's vessel as his guest, determined to return with him to England and claim his title and estates as he had a right to do.

After a double wedding at the Hayward mansion, the Playful set sail, having on board Captain Sedgemoor and his bride, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Shields, Lord Duval Dunmore, the latter having invited the two young couples to become his guests at Craghead Castle, where all remembrance would be obliterated of the past that had been to them full of sorrows.

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